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Consumer Culture Theory

John W. Schouten
Diane M. Martin
Russell Belk
Editors

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CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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RESEARCH IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR   VOLUME 16

CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

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INTRODUCTION

The map precedes the territory.
– Jean Baudrillard

The ninth annual conference on Consumer Culture Theory has met, flourished, and newly invigorated a community of scholars with exchanges of ideas during a few endless days of Helsinki summer. The epigram above speaks to the conference theme: Mapping Consumer Culture – Latitudes, Legends and Declination. The term *latitudes* alludes not only to Finland's far-north position on the globe but also, through alternative meanings, to a sense of breadth and freedom of movement that characterizes research in the consumer culture tradition. With the word *legends* we allude both to the keys that make maps decipherable and to the myths, stories and narratives that drive much of our understanding of cultural processes and markets. *Declination* has a special meaning in the realm of map-and-compass navigation. It is the difference between true north, as indicated on a map, and magnetic north, as indicated by a compass. The degree of declination changes dramatically from location to location, and a failure to understand it, whether the gap is literal and geographical or figurative and cultural, can leave the explorer lost and in trouble.

Explorers of consumer culture reside and work from six continents among people as varied as the topographies we inhabit. From rustic villages to swarming cities we are cartographers of human experience as it relates to markets and consumption. As such we rely on existing maps, the legends for which cover a wide latitude of theoretical perspectives. From an equally broad range of methods we also draw new maps and new legends. In navigating cultural landscapes we must take care to reflect on our own positions with respect to that which we study, lest in relying on language and assumptions calibrated to our own experience we fall victims to declination.

In our first decade as a named community, consumer culture theorists have expanded our reach in important ways. Methodologically we continue

to push at the frontiers of the marketing motherland. In addition to the standard methods of interpretive and critical work we increasingly welcome methods from the humanities. Videography is becoming more sophisticated and expressive. Poetry has its own annual CCT volume. Short fiction, art photography and theater have made debuts. And for the first time, the CCT conference hosted a gallery for consumption-related visual arts. This edition's opening article, a transcript of Stephen Brown's keynote address, urges us to keep pushing our borders.

Our geographical expansion proceeds less by colonizing new regions from seats of Anglo-American power than by inviting and embracing regional perspectives on their own terms. Two special topic sessions, the abstracts of which are included in this volume, illustrate the value of regional perspectives on consumer culture. One session explores the nuances of the Nordic while the other arises from the tropical temperament of Brazil.

Another region that we find increasingly welcoming to consumer culture work lies behind the high walls of tradition – namely positivist, quantitative and cognitive traditions – that surround the bustling cities of business management. Individual consumer culture scholars have breached those walls a number of times with notable works, but this year's CCT conference made a first run at an institutional incursion. In a parallel conference hosted by Aalto Executive Education and DDB Nordic, eight of the intellectual pioneers of consumer culture research guided an appreciative audience of marketing practitioners on a deep dive of consumer insight.

In Finland's far northern latitudes the seasonal extremes of day and night color our perspectives. We have special relations with light and water. Midsummer skies never darken, and winter's low, reflected light seems to emanate from the snow. Summer lakes become winter roads. Sauna turns water into ritual steam binding friends and family together. We also experience consumption, markets, society and government in differently diffracted light. Our hope for this volume is that it will inspire current and future researchers to carry their own light into those areas of consumer culture that remain uncharted.

John W. Schouten
Diane M. Martin
Russell Belk
Editors

PETALS ON A WET, BLACK BRAND: THE PLACE OF POETRY IN CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY[1]

Stephen Brown

Sfx: *"Hot" by Reckless Love, 80 seconds, then fade ...*

Accompanying dance routine [badly performed]: Movie and popular culture mashup, including moves from Love Actually, Grease, Austin Powers, Thriller, *Beyoncé's* Single Ladies *and Psy's* Gangnam Style. *Twerking was given serious consideration but, in the interest of audience wellbeing, rightly abandoned.*[2]

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ST

For the Duration
Of this Presentation
Of Disinformation
About Alliteration
And Analogous Affectations
CCT stands for
Crazy Celtic Troubadour
Crazy Celtic Troublemaker
Crazy Celtic Twinkletoes
Crazy Celtic Tinkerbell

And they say that middle-aged men can't dance. They're frickin right, let me tell you! I used to be younger than Russ Belk, you know. I used to be somebody … you could rely on to make a fool of himself at a conference. Some things never change, you'll be pleased to hear. You'll also be pleased to hear that I have considered the conference theme – Latitudes, Legends, Declination – and decided to decline legends and treat latitudes with a degree of latitude by talking about poetry. Yes, poetry. I am going to tell you some home truths about the place of poetry in Consumer Culture Theory, while remaining mindful of the immortal words of Emily Dickinson – tell the truth but tell it with a slant. Or indeed a *sláinte*.

I begin with the late great American novelist David Foster Wallace, whose *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never do Again* is required reading for every self-respecting consumer researcher. He was once invited to identify the most poetic word in the English language. Now, David Foster Wallace was a very great lover of words and his vocabulary was almost as big as John Sherry's. So, after thinking long and hard, he finally concluded that the most poetic word in the English language is … moist. Moist. Moist. Moist. He then added that moist was especially impressive when used in conjunction with the second most poetic word in the English Language: Loincloth.

Brothers and sisters, this is neither the time nor the place to get into moist loincloths, if I can put it like that, so let me steer your thoughts away from humid netherwear toward what I consider to be the most poetic words in the English language. Your paper has been accepted for publication. Your paper has been accepted for publication. Your paper has been accepted for publication.

Sadly, I very rarely encounter that particular iambic pentameter and have to make do with the alliterative Revise and Resubmit or the agonising assonance of Desk Reject. True, my ratio of the three poetic responses varies from journal to journal. Top tier journals, it's Desk Reject from here to eternity. Middle-ranking journals, I usually manage one or two rounds of R&R before rejection. But only because I possess incriminating information on the editorial review boards – usually photographic, occasionally pornographic. When it comes to low-level journals, however, it's acceptance all the way, mainly because they've got me mixed up with the other Stephen Brown, the renowned Stephen Brown of services marketing fame, from Arizona State University.

Actually, having an academic namesake isn't as bad as you might think. It means I can take credit for all his high-calibre publications and pin my pathetic postmodern papers on him. The down side is that I keep getting glowing emails from Academia.edu informing me that my work has been cited. 'Cept that it isn't my work! It's you know who's, the SOB. That automated email really rubs salt in the wounds of my nonentity and reminds me – as if I needed reminding – that I'm a failure with a capital frickin F.

Indeed, I am speaking to you this afternoon as a self-confessed failure, a serial failure, a bone-fide failure, a failure who once wrote a book about failure, which failed to sell. Though that's quite appropriate when you think about it, because if my book about failure had succeeded that would be contrary to the spirit of the text. Well, that's how I comfort myself in the still of the night or when my annual royalty statement arrives. Well, it isn't so much a statement as an insult. When I open the envelope, a ball of metaphorical tumbleweed rolls across the floor, a howling wind picks up from nowhere and a bell tolls mournfully in the distance.

Having lowered your expectations – low though they were to start with when I threw a few arthritic shapes – let me move on to the abject subject of today's failfest. Before I do that, though, I have to issue a Health and Safety warning. If you are susceptible to seizures, don't look at my transitions. That is not a euphemism, by the way. Seriously, don't look at my Slide Transitions because they contain subliminal embeds, powerful embeds, poetic embeds – poembeds – which can cause convulsions, possibly foaming at the mouth … and/or loincloth. Whoa! But most of you should be okay. In fact, some of the more intelligent and discerning among you might even be able to *see* my subliminal poetic primes. However, you have to be very, very smart for that to happen. Or very sensitive, very attuned to the primal power of poetry.

Sfx: *"Hot" by Reckless Love, 8 seconds, then fade ...*

> ST
>
> BUY ...
> BUY ...
> BUY ...

Don't worry, there's nothing in the first one. Well, I can't see anything…

Moving swiftly on, it seems to me that poetry is the USP of CCT, which as Bernard Cova shows, was specifically formulated and successfully launched as an academic brand. CCT is a fantastic academic brand, a distinctive academic brand, an academic brand that has achieved great things, as the attendance at conferences like this is testament. However, it's a brand that's in need of a reboot, in my humble opinion. It's a brand that has become increasingly bland, unthreatening, innocuous. It's a brand, conversely, whose poetic component has become ever more important as its publications have become ever more prosaic, formulaic, generic. Poetry, it seems to me, is our principal link to the Heroic Age of consumer research, when right-on relativists – like Alladi Venkatesh there – were confronting the dark forces of Shelby D. Hunt, the Great Satan of scholarship, the Lord Voldemort of marketing. And, yes, the D. in Shelby D. Hunt, does indeed stand for Damien.[3] Though in fairness to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Cited, Shelby once quoted Robert Frost's poetry in a particularly infernal *JCR* article, the devious devil.

> SS1
>
> The Five Ages of CCT
>
> Age One: 1975–1985
> *Rhymes with Hunt*
>
> [images of elephants battling lions, echo paradigm wars]

Writing poetry may not get you promotion, my friends, never mind tenure. But the writing of poetry has been vital for the promotion of CCT.

It signifies that we are creative, cool, CRAZY, receptive to the unorthodox, to the idiosyncratic, to the offbeat, to alternative forms of expression. It's a free-floating signifier of sorts; an artistic aura that surrounds our sub-discipline; a halo, if you will, that has encircled us since the halcyon days of HCR, Heretical Consumer Research, an annual gathering of refuseniks that preceded the ACR conference as a stand-alone event, but was slowly absorbed into the main constellation like a dazzling astronomical conference being sucked into an abyssal black hole.

My intention in this afternoon's presentation is to tether our free-floating signifier, to subject it to commentary and consideration that has been somewhat lacking thus far. Poetry's too important to us to be left alone. If it is the CCT brand's USP, our special ingredient, our academic calling card, then we need to contemplate it from time to time, as the Johns Sherry and Schouten did back in 2002, as Robin Canniford has done, as Roel Wijland is doing in his forthcoming book for Routledge.[4]

You may, of course, be wondering what my credentials are as a poetry critic. We don't recall you declaiming your rhyming couplets at last night's poetry event, Stephen. And it is true; I'm not a poet. Yes, I'm a lover of language. I love it well rather than wisely, some say. I'm more of a linguistic *flâneur* than a poetic *auteur*, so to speak. So much so, that people occasionally come up to me and say, "What the fuck are you doing in a business school?" And I say to them: "Mummy, I think you've had too much gin and tonic for one night." My comments, then, are those of an informed outsider, an ill-informed outsider.

Having said that, I have written one or two poems in my time, which are classics of their type. Or so John Schouten tells me. I sent one to him and he said it had all the hallmarks of quality. Or perhaps it was all the qualities of Hallmark, I can't quite remember. You may laugh, but I'll have you know that I delivered it the very last time I was keynote speaker … at a major mainstream marketing conference. With apologies to Sid Levy, it went:

> There once was a scholar called Kotler,
> Who did what he shouldn't have oughter,
> He broadened the field,
> But lowered the yield,
> And led us like lambs to the slaughter.

Surprisingly, I haven't been a keynote speaker since. The invitations must have got lost in the post or inadvertently incinerated by my university's firewall. True, I tried to make a comeback with the *Titanic*, which

had an even better poem attached. However that one sank without trace, you'll be relieved to hear:

Come listen, me hearties, to a song of the sea
To the sorrowful story of *Titanic* and me
My grandfather helped build her for Harland & Wolff
He was limber with timber, his staircase was proof.

Bob's brother, name of Billy, also worked in the yard
He hammered them rivets and he hammered them hard
But he wasn't as careful as my granddad had been
His bolts went in bandy when they should have been clean.

Now, this wouldn't have mattered, but Billy worked at the front
Where his bandywork shattered when she got that wee shunt
So the great ship went under, with brave Captain Smith
And the bandsmen still playing, you all know the myth.

But back in her birthplace in old Belfast town
When people were asking why *Titanic* went down
Some said it was White Star, the crew were all clowns
Though the truth is, me hearties, it was because of the Browns.

And now it's my privilege, with this PowerPoint package
To talk of the branding and selling of heritage
But before you get angry at my mercenary activity
I must make it clear I'll be speaking metaphorically.

***Sfx**: "Hot" by Reckless Love, 8 seconds, then fade ...*

ST

BROWN'S ...
BROWN'S ...
BROWN'S ...

As you've no doubt noticed, my idea of poetry hails from the rumpety-tumpety end of the spectrum. Rumpety-tumpety is a technical term, by the way, as are clippety-clop and de-dum, de-dum, de-dum. I was brought up in what T. S. Eliot termed the "thumper" school of Anglo-American poetry: "Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack;/Butting through the Channel in the mad March days"; "Half a league, half a league,/Half a league onward,/All in the Valley of Death/Rode the six hundred"; "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,/Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,/While I nodded, nearly

napping, suddenly there came a tapping,/As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door."

SS2

Age Two: 1985–1995
The Extended Belk

[aerial views of diverse landscapes, echo of Odyssey]

As a consequence of my upbringing, I find it quite hard to appreciate "modern" poetry – free verse, para-rhymes, dropped lines, non-metronomic rhythm, egregious enjambments, etc. And I'm not the only one to feel that way. The vast majority of ordinary people prefer poems that rhyme in time and regard those that don't or won't as deadbeats, basically. The steady decline in the sales of poetry is not unrelated to rumpety-tumpety's abandonment and the pockets of popularity in rap music, performance poetry and the hot, hot, hotter than Hell lyrics of Finland's foremost rock band, often revert to clippety-clop hip-hop.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I've read my fair share of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and what have you. And I admire them greatly. But mainly, I must confess, because they also wrote "proper" poems in traditional metre. Having proved that they can slalom between the gates, as it were, they have permission to ski off-piste. Picasso, analogously, could be a brilliant figurative painter when he put his mind to it, thereby earning the right to create clinkered Cubist canvasses. Thus, although Ezra Pound is renowned for his complicated *Cantos*; although T. S. Eliot is lauded for *The Waste Land's* esoteric imagery; although W. B. Yeats is celebrated for *The Second Coming*, *Sailing to Byzantium*, *Under Ben Bulbin* and more besides, I find myself in agreement with Robert Frost who stated that writing free verse is like playing tennis without a net. My favourite Yeats poem, I won't deny it, is *The Fiddler of Dooney*. A fabulous little ballad, written in 1899, it never fails to raise the hairs of my pelt and send shivers down my spine:

> When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
> Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
> My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,
> My brother in Moharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:
They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time,
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on the three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With "Here is the fiddler of Dooney"
And dance like a wave of the sea.

Or, in my case, a wave of the seasick, the nauseous, the man overboard with an anchor tied to his ankle ….

All that thrill-filled fiddling, I suppose, is why I long struggled with CCT's poetic output; why I was less than overwhelmed when I saw words scattered willy-nilly across the pages of *CMC*; why, when I witnessed someone reading their poem from an iPad or sheet or paper, I so wanted to shout, "Recite the thing, for Christ's sake!"; and, why I harboured doubts about the calibre of our collective corpus, though that is less true these days for reasons I'll recount shortly.

That said, I have always recognised that CCT's poetic oeuvre is a political masterstroke. By eschewing rumpety-tumpety, which any idiot can understand – even me – we add considerably to our cultural capital current account and every conference makes an additional deposit. Poesy thus elevates us above the knuckle-dragging, facts-focussed, quants jocks of mainstream marketing. It positions us as the Romantics of research, the Beats of the business school, the way-cool counter-culture of Critical consumer studies. Ohhhh. Except we do a wee bit of consultancy work on the side. We fill our boots with loot from the suits while spouting sedition in sonorous sonnets. We sell rebellion with rhyme-less arrhythmia. Or so a cynic might surmise.

We are not alone, admittedly, when it comes to selling out. For my sins, I have done some research on "authorpreneurship." That is, the marketing practices and tactics of creative writers and artists, past and present – J. K. Rowling, James Joyce, the Surrealists and so forth. These studies

show that a surprising number of successful authorpreneurs have a modicum of marketing in their backgrounds. James Patterson, the mega-selling novelist, used to work in advertising for instance, as did Don DeLillo, Elmore Leonard, Dr Seuss, Salman Rushdie, Fay Weldon, Dorothy L. Sayers and F. Scott Fitzgerald. My research also reveals that those who make the most vitriolic attacks on commercialisation, commodification, the benighted bourgeoisie and suchlike often turn out to be the most marketing savvy. W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, the most modern of Modernists, the most vehement opponents of greasy till fumblers who add the half pence to the pence, were marvellously adroit marketers in their day.

Sfx: *"Hot" by Reckless Love, 8 seconds, then fade …*

ST

BOOKS …
BOOKS …
BOOKS …

Although this particular tributary of my personal research stream rarely breaches the levees of the leading journals – let alone the sandbags surrounding second level academic outlets – it led to a consultancy gig of my own, a gig that changed my attitude to our community's poetic achievements. It didn't make me a better poet. Hell no. You've heard the best I can do. It didn't make me a lot of money, none in fact, though it enriched me in other ways. It isn't something I've ever talked about publically, though you'll understand why when I tell you.

SS3

Age Three: 1995–2005
MoHo's PoMo Mojo A-Go-Go

[time-lapse images of Finland, echo of time-space compression]

Before we get to that, I should perhaps explain that I don't do consultancy work. Primarily because no one ever commissions me. And, on the

rare occasions when companies do get in touch, my first thought is: Jesus, if you're asking me for help, your brand must really be in trouble. Either that or they've got me mixed up with the other Stephen Brown again. I usually pass them on to him. Hey, it's least I can do. If only as repayment for my stupendous curriculum vitae and stratospheric citation scores …

Actually, there is one significant exception to the rule, a weird geographical exception. Iran. Yes, Iran. I am constantly approached by Iranian companies asking for guidance. Marketing guidance, that is, not guidance control systems or anything. This has been going on for years and I couldn't work out why. And then I discovered that an article of mine is required reading in every Iranian business school, of which there are plenty. I can only assume it was planted by the CIA in order to do untold damage to Iran's economic prospects, going forward.[5] So, in an attempt to maintain friendly Irish-Iranian relations, I politely decline their kind invitations.

But that is by the by. The point I'm trying to make is that, as a general rule, I don't do consultancy work. However. However. However. A few years ago, I was approached by Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Prize-winning poet, arguably the most famous English language poet in the world until his untimely passing last year. Hence, I am finally able to talk about it.

Anyway, some years ago, he got in touch looking for marketing advice. Apparently, he had read an article of mine in *Business Horizons*, an article about Samuel Beckett, the great Nobel Prize-winning Irish playwright, who was also a very canny authorpreneur. Seamus Heaney, by the way, was not a regular reader of *Business Horizons*. My analysis of the Beckett brand had been picked up by the literary magazines. It was featured in the *Times Literary Supplement* and reprinted by *Harper's* in the States. Seamus found out about it from somewhere and he sent me one of the handwritten postcards he was famed for.

To be honest, I was a bit hesitant about accepting Famous Seamus's invitation. I thought it was a spoof to start off with, one of my esteemed colleagues making mock of my "artistic" research pretentions. Even when I realised it wasn't a joke, I was still reluctant. Not because of my no consultancy policy. But because I didn't know the great man's work. His poems weren't taught in the schools I went to, his name wasn't even mentioned. I'm ashamed to say that until Seamus got in contact I hadn't read any of his writings. But then again, he was one of those awful Modernist types that I couldn't warm to, wasn't he?

As I'm sure you know, poets occupy a special place in Irish society. Part of the bardic-druidic tradition, they are the lightning rods, the GPS satellites, of Irish culture. Clearly, therefore, it was a tremendous honour to be

contacted by Famous Seamus Heaney. If truth be told, I was humbled by the fact that he had not only read something I'd written but that he hadn't cast it aside with a snort of derision, the way marketing journal editors ordinarily do. I made a beeline for his collected poems. I was amazed by the power of his imagery, which has been brilliantly described as the "squelching of a leaky boot in a peat bog." More than that, I was delighted by his occasional use of traditional rhyme schemes, as for instance in *Twice Shy*:

> Her scarf à la Bardot,
> In suede flats for the walk,
> She came with me one evening
> For air and friendly talk.
> We crossed the quiet river,
> Took the embankment walk …

I also read *Preoccupations*, an early anthology of Heaney's prose pieces, which includes his adaptation of Mark Twain's insightful observation that history doesn't repeat itself, it rhymes. So I accepted the consultancy gig.

Sfx: *"Hot" by Reckless Love, 8 seconds, then fade …*

ST YOU … YOU … YOU …

Needless to say, it was with considerable trepidation that I went down to meet the great man in his house outside Dublin. You must understand, apart from the fact that we were both from Northern Ireland, Seamus and I had almost nothing in common. He was a very devout Catholic, I'm a badly lapsed Protestant. His family background was rural and agricultural, mine is urban and industrial. He was the apotheosis of high Celtic culture, I represent the dregs of Anglo-Saxon commerce. He was probably the most garlanded man in Ireland – Nobel Prize, T. S. Eliot award, E. M. Foster award, Professor of Poetry at Harvard and Oxford, face plastered on postage stamps, portraits in the National Gallery – whereas my conference papers usually get rejected by ACR, this year's submission included. Worst of all, though, I didn't really know his work and I suspected that this proud

Irish nationalist wouldn't exactly appreciate an imperialist rendition of "Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smokestack"…

SS4

Age Four: 2005–2015
Crafty Corporate Takeover

[multiple images of robotic technology, echo of cloned scholarship]

As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about. He was charm personified. I'd heard that he was a terrific people person, despite his mind-boggling eminence, and it was true. He had every reason to dislike me, and I'm not exactly a ray of sunshine at the best of times – as my students can confirm – but he disguised his distaste with aplomb. The man's postbag, his mail, had just arrived when I got to his house in Strand Road and, literally, it comprised a sack full of invitations, requests, entreaties, fan letters, books to blurb, offers of honorary degrees and poems that people sent for his blessing. However he set them all aside while we had a good old chinwag.

He told me about his childhood back on the farm in Bellaghy and how he almost became a cattle dealer like his father and grandfather before him. Cattle dealers, for your information, are the canniest salespeople you're ever likely to come across. He told me how much he used to look forward, as a child, to the arrival of the mobile grocery shop, because he loved the packaging of the products on display – products like HP sauce, Saxa salt, Camp coffee, Campbell's concentrated soups, Jacob's cream crackers, Coleman's mustard powder and more besides. Seamus likewise waxed lyrical about the advertising slogans of his youth: "Beanz Meanz, Heinz"; "Guinness is Good for You"; "You'll Wonder Where the Yellow Went, When You Brush Your Teeth With Pepsodent." The man was a great lover of marketing. It was his guilty pleasure. He regarded advertising slogans as a genre of poetry, with their haiku-like compression. He wasn't an art-for-art's-sake elitist, a member of the literary jet set who condemned the crassness of capitalism while enjoying its Business Class benefactions and Presidential Suite pleasure domes. This was a man who knew how to sell a herd of cattle … or a collection of poetry.

Inevitably, we got round to the subject of authorpreneurship. I told him about the commercial acumen of Yeats, Joyce, Shaw, Wilde and what have

you. This was something he hadn't *really* considered before, because marketing is the love that dare not speak its name in elite literary circles. The word is normally used in a pejorative sense and "brand" has ironic inverted commas permanently attached. Actually, I think he quite enjoyed coming out of the commercial closet, clutching a canister of Camp coffee. The great man was manifestly an authorpreneur at heart.

We spent most of our time, funnily enough, talking about Ezra Pound. Now, Pound was an utterly loathsome person. But as Seamus made clear to me, he was a prodigiously gifted poet. Imagism, the school of poetry Pound promulgated, was central to the entire Modernist movement and the subsequent development of 20th and 21st century verse. Pound's focus on single, striking, luminous images, his determination to replace elevated with everyday language, and his overthrow of metronomic metre for what he called *melopoeia*, the musical phrase, were the keys to comprehending contemporary poetry. Seamus said.

I, on the other hand, sang Pound's praises as a marketing man. How he modelled himself on P. T. Barnum. How he hustled and hassled and hyped his protégés like Eliot, Joyce and Hemingway. How he dressed up in extravagant, attention-grabbing outfits – sombreros, silk scarves, swirling cloaks, sapphire earrings and, for all I know, moist loincloths on occasion. I emphasised that Ezra had a terrific flair for advertising slogans, such as "Make It New," the celebrated catchphrase for Modernism as a whole, and of course his famous fourteen-word Imagist poem *In a Station of the Metro*, which could easily be advertising copy for one of today's luxury brands:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

Surely, Seamus then said to me, he meant petals on a wet, black brand. And that, my friends, is where the title of today's presentation comes from.

It was at this point, if memory serves, that I mentioned my reservations about Modernist poetry and confessed that I was a rumpety-tumpety man at heart. So Seamus spent the next hour or so giving me a personal tutorial. He was a schoolteacher before becoming a full-time writer, so I suppose it was water off a duck's back to him. But, at the time, it felt like I was one of the sinners, the Prodigal Son, that the sainted Seamus Heaney was determined to save from perdition. Bear in mind that I was supposed to be the consultant in this arrangement. Yet there I was getting a personal master-class on poetry appreciation from a Nobel Prize winner! It helped

me realise where I'd erred in my hasty evaluation of CCT's versifiers. He also advised me to cut out all the allusive alliteration in my own writing ….

I told him he was a fool, who knew nothing about art!

***Sfx**: "Hot" by Reckless Love, 8 seconds, then fade …*

ST
BASTARDS … BASTARDS … BASTARDS …

Anyway, we eventually got round to the reason Seamus wanted my marketing advice in the first place. Ever since the Nobel Prize, he'd been swamped by demands on his time. He had become too popular. His brand had gone global, despite its tiny production plant. He was struggling to cope with ever-rising consumer expectation, interest, attention, adulation. He was wondering, basically, if there was a clever way of stopping the marketing machine, which was overheating and running out of control. So, I talked to him about de-marketing, Kotler and Levy's classic concept. And he just loved the expression, largely I think because when "de-marketing" is said in a Dublin accent – de marketing, de marketing, de marketing – it sounds a bit like "the marketing." The definite article amused him greatly. De-marketing was *the* marketing as far as Seamus Heaney was concerned.

SS5
Age Five: 2015–2025 *Bodes Well for the Future*
[science-fiction images of outer space, echo of uncertain futures]

You can guess what happened next … He asked for my best de-marketing advice. Look, I tried to explain to him that I was the kiss of death, advice-wise. Just what he wanted. I told him that my book about failure had failed to sell. You're the man for me, he said. I informed him that he's got me confused with the real Stephen Brown. He said that meeting one was quite sufficient, thanks all the same. I even insinuated – forgive me, Sidney –

that Kotler and Levy's de-marketing concept was untenable because there once was a scholar called Kotler who did what he shouldn't have oughter. Seamus shuddered with horror at that point.

So I told him what he wanted to hear. I suggested to this laudably luminous lyric poet that he write an *unreadable* book to deter, to dismay, to disillusion his readership. You know, the literary equivalent of egotistical rock stars who take up acting or actors who form embarrassing rock bands. Better yet, I continued, make it a book in translation, since everyone knows that translations don't sell and wasn't it Robert Frost who said poets get lost in translation?

Seamus took my sagacious advice. He translated *Beowulf*, a practically unreadable seventh-century Anglo-Saxon epic. And it turned out to be the bestselling book of his career. Far and away the bestselling book of his career. A book that lifted him to a completely new level of popular acclaim, with all the attendant demands, pressures, expectations, etc. From my perspective, the entire episode was akin to an Ezra Pound production of *Springtime for Hitler*. The only consolation – from a consultancy standpoint – was that his translation of Beowulf is full of alliteration. So at least he learned something from our encounter.

For years thereafter, I'd get spoof postcards from Famous Seamus asking for more de-marketing advice. The bank account is running low, Stephen, what would you recommend I *don't* do? Yes, very funny. Go ahead, Heaney, make mock of me if it makes you happy. Surely the greatest living Irishman has better things to do with his time than torment an inconsequential Ulster academic. Eventually, in order to get my own back, I sent him my poem about the *Titanic* …

Silence.

Howling wind, tolling bell, frozen tumbleweed entombed in an iceberg in the middle of the empty Atlantic Ocean.

On a happier note, I used to send him poems written by CCT people, whenever thy appeared in *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, etc. He loved them. He thought it was terrific what our community was trying to do. He was absolutely thrilled when I sent him the little anthologies that Roel, John and Hilary put together for the past few conferences. I told him about our poetry slams and so on and he promised to attend one day. He might have been joking, I suppose, but I don't think he was. I honestly think Seamus Heaney would have been here this year if the Grim Reaper hadn't intervened. He sent me a couple of texts to that effect while he was in hospital, waiting around for his operation. They were tongue-in-cheek, of course, written in the rumpety-tumpety style that I know and love and that amused him no end. He regarded me, rightly, as the last troglodyte in Europe.

As I'm sure you're aware, the great man died on the operating table and obviously can't be here to make his keynote address entitled "Petals on a Wet, Black Brand." However, I thought you might like to know what his final texts said:

> Hi-diddle-dee-dee, it's CCT for me
> Just give me a shout, when I'm up and about
> I'll be at the next one, you'll see.

And so he is, in a way …

Here's how I replied:

ST

Buy
Brown's
Books,
You
Bastard!

Only kidding. Seamus Heaney, I should say in conclusion, was a great believer in Schumpeter's idea of creative destruction applied to the cultural sphere. He didn't believe in resting on his laurels or recycling his repertoire of rural tropes. He was always trying different things. His credo was that "Creative talent must exert itself beyond the limit." Let me repeat that, because Seamus repeated it constantly: "Creative talent must exert itself beyond the limit." Seamus Heaney was a radical at heart and became increasingly so as he grew older and found himself constrained by the cashmere handcuffs of eminence.

SS6

[slowly fading image of Seamus Heaney, against falling petals backdrop]

Naturally, this got me thinking about Interpretive Consumer Research and how we got to where we are today. It got me thinking about the stages of development we've lived through and the shifts in emphasis along the

way. It got me thinking about how we've evolved from radical rebellion to reactionary respectability, how all too often these days we follow the established format when writing our standardised academic articles and are intolerant of those who don't. As I used to be about poetry.

It seems to me, though, that every decade or so has seen a significant shakeup as history strives to rhyme each time. And now that CCT's decade is almost up, I for one am very much looking forward to seeing what comes next from you guys, from you young people. This community belongs to you, brothers and sisters, not middle-aged men who can't dance. Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law. Do what thou wilt, young soul rebels, is the whole of the law. If the kids wanna dance, then let them!

Our poetry, I trust, will sail on regardless, weathering the storm like a dirty Celtic coaster with its salt-caked bar snack, supping pints of Guinness on a fine Finn day.

Sfx: Riverdance*, music by Bill Whelan, 80 seconds, then fade ...*

Accompanying dance routine [badly performed]: Movie and popular culture mashup, including moves from Love Actually, Grease, Austin Powers, Thriller, *Beyoncé's* Single Ladies *and Psy's* Gangnam Style. *Irish step-dancing was given serious consideration but, in the interest of audience well-being, rightly abandoned.*

You'll forgive me if I don't answer any of your questions. As the legendary American poet Archibald MacLeish almost said, "A presentation should not mean but be"... a performance.[6] Enjoy the rest of the conference. Thank you for your time.

NOTES

1. This is to confirm that the foregoing chapter is an exact transcript of an oral presentation delivered at Aalto Business School, Helskinki, Finland, on 28th June 2014. The poems it contains were recited from memory, not read from published sources, without compromising the rights of the copyright holders.
2. The accompanying visuals comprised six slide sequences (SS), separated by slide transitions (ST). The images and script recount two contrasting narratives. The former is a story of perdition (the five stages of CCT's evolution, from idealism to ossification); the latter is a story of redemption (an old-fashioned stuck-in-the-mud is enlightened by a life-enhancing artistic encounter). The twin-track narratives run in parallel and, while this can be unsettling for those who are used to linear, PowerPoint-propelled presentations, it accords with the theme of my talk.

3. This quip was greeted with silence, I'm sorry to say. I guess people must have forgotten about *The Omen*, starring Gregory Peck and Lee Remick, where the seemingly beatific yet utterly diabolical little boy was called Damien. The name was tainted for decades thereafter. Ever get the feeling you're getting old?

4. Please note, my presentations aim to be allusive and ambiguous rather than focussed and factual. I don't believe in ramming messages down the audience's throat, or making "points" for that matter. I aim for an "open text," which audiences can interpret as they see fit.

5. I'm guessing that the CIA has a scholarly Special Forces division of some sort, complete with dedicated SWAT team, or even a bibliographic Black Ops brigade. They say Shelbs is in charge. I can neither confirm nor deny such rumours.

6. Archibald MacLeish, former editor of *Fortune* – and founding father of the CIA, whose long arm still extends to CCT publications, apparently – famously stated in *Ars Poetica* that a poem should not mean but be.

EXPLORING FANTASY IN CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

Anastasia Seregina

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *Fantasy is a concept often used in everyday life and in academic research. While it has received attention in consumer research due to its connection to desires, community creation, meaning evocation, and identity development, it lacks a commonly shared understanding. This paper explores and theorizes consumers' experiences of fantasy as performed in real-life situations.*

Method – *The research was conducted as an ethnographic study of live action role-playing games (LARP) and analyzed through the lens of performance theory.*

Findings – *LARPs are performances that take place between imagination and embodied reality, with participants drawing on each realm to enrich the other. Consumption elements of LARP include media products and materials used in creating settings, costumes, and props. LARPers gain various benefits from the performance of fantasy, including escapist entertainment, self-reflection, personal growth, and participation in social criticism. Fantasy performance is, therefore, an important and*

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under-theorized vehicle for consumer identity development and social interaction.

Theoretical implications – *This research theorizes the experience of fantasy as a performance that takes place between reality and imagination. As such, it involves both embodied and social aspects that have largely been ignored in prior research. A richer theorization of fantasy performance promises greater insights into research areas including the dynamics of consumer identity projects and of consumption communities.*

Keywords: Fantasy; imagination; LARP; identity; performance theory

The importance of fantasy as part of playful and imaginative contemporary consumption has been long noted by consumer research (Campbell, 1987; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Sherry, 1990). The concept has received attention in recent years (e.g., Chronis, Arnould, & Hampton, 2013; Illouz, 2007; Kozinets et al., 2004; Martin, 2004; Penaloza, 2001; St. James, Handelman, & Taylor, 2011), yet continues to be under-explored and often overlooked (Stevens & Maclaran, 2005). Fantasy is an important concept in understanding consumers' lives (Belk & Costa, 1998; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Kozinets, 2001) in that it connects to desires (Campbell, 1987), community creation (Kozinets, 2002), meaning evocation (Penaloza, 2001), and identity development (Belk & Costa, 1998; Schouten, 1991). However, while we have an intuition or a feel for what fantasy means, we fail to articulate it, as its forms are multiple and subjective (Armitt, 1996; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Illouz, 2007; Traill, 1996). Fantasy is also often mixed with a number of similar concepts, such as imagination, Utopia, dreams, magic, and fiction (Illouz, 2009; Jameson, 2005), making it all the more difficult to define or give value to (Jackson, 1981).

Consumer research has explored various consumption contexts that incorporate fantasy (e.g., Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets et al., 2004), as well as consumers' practices of manifesting the imaginary in consumption (Martin, 2004) and consumption objects (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011; St. James et al., 2011). Studies have portrayed fantasy from very different perspectives, ranging from an escapist entertainment environment (e.g., Kozinets et al., 2004; Martin, 2004) to an enabler of possibility and agency (e.g., Belk & Costa, 1998; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011; St. James

et al., 2011), resulting in no standardized meaning or proper definition of the concept within consumer research. While many different viewpoints have been presented, the treatment of the concept of fantasy has remained focused on mental imagery and consumers' inner worlds (Martin, 2004), often disregarding other aspects of fantasy (Chronis et al., 2013). Moreover, studies often confine fantasy to its context, failing to link the concept to consumers' overall lives and wider cultural processes (Chronis et al., 2013; Kozinets, 2001; Penaloza, 2001).

Fantasy cannot exist as purely individual introspection emerging spontaneously: it is conditioned by culture and individuals' everyday lives, as this is what renders it recognizable and attractive (Fine, 1983). It leaks into individuals' lives and becomes an inseparable part of their daily practices, knowledge, personal, and social histories (Chronis et al., 2013; Hoogland, 2002). Fantasy can thus be seen as a negotiated social process intertwined with cognitive, emotional, and embodied elements of consumers' lives that controls, shapes, and produces experiences (Chronis et al., 2013). Locating fantasy as an embodied and negotiated process can help us understand how fantasy is present in consumption (Chronis et al., 2013; Jenkins, Nixon, & Molesworth, 2011) and what its role is in creating society and cultural meaning (Hoogland, 2002; Penaloza, 2001). The aim of this research is therefore to explore how fantasy is experienced.

FANTASY IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Fantasy is often seen within consumer research as the creation of new worlds, which involve the freedom of going beyond the limitations of what is known and believed (Kozinets et al., 2004; Martin, 2004; Sherry et al., 2001). It is a place of escape and refuge, separate from the real world (Belk & Costa, 1998) and associated with themes found in mass media (Kozinets, 2001; Martin, 2004). Fantasy environments have been strongly connected to the idea of Utopia that brings a sense of being removed from real life and real consumption, enabling relaxation, renewal, and acceptance for its users (Belk & Costa, 1998; Hirschman, 1988; Kozinets, 2001). Consumer research frequently emphasizes the fancy-free emancipation created by fantasy: a mere entertainment or a pleasurable diversion from real life and its worries, aided by consumption objects (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011) and consumption environments (Kozinets et al., 2004; Sherry et al., 2001). In line with these views, a trivializing connotation of the concept of

fantasy persists, causing it to be seen as irrational, unserious, and frivolous (Armitt, 1996; Hume, 1984; Jackson, 1981).

In addition to entertainment, consumer research has connected fantasy to a realm of possibility and a process of negotiating aspects of daily life (Belk & Costa, 1998; Hoogland, 2002; St. James et al., 2011). Studies have noted that fantasy can become intertwined with consumers' everyday lives, helping set and pursue goals, sustain hope, and cope with problems (Kozinets et al., 2004; Rook & Levy, 1983; St. James et al., 2011). Fantasy can help express identity and enrich experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Rook & Levy, 1983) through its negotiation with elements of reality (Rose & Wood, 2005; Stevens & Maclaran, 2005; St. James et al., 2011).

FANTASY AND IMAGINATION

As it already became evident, the concept of fantasy does not have a clear or standardized definition, but views on it vary and even contradict one another. Dictionaries present fantasy as something closely connected to imagination and strongly opposing fact, reality, and truth. The Oxford Dictionary (2013), for instance, defines fantasy as "the faculty or activity of imagining impossible or improbable things," adding that it can also be "the product of this faculty or activity," or "an idea with no basis in reality." In a similar manner, research has presented fantasy to be a secondary elaboration (Jameson, 2005), an expression (Martin, 2004), the evoking (Illouz, 2009), an activity (Mackay, 2001), and the extension and discussion of imagination (Fine, 1983). Consumer research seems to accept the important role of imagination as part of fantasy (Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2001), using the two almost interchangeably (e.g., Chronis et al., 2013; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011; Kozinets, 2001; Martin, 2004; St. James et al., 2011).

Imagination is typically identified as something immaterial (McLuhan, 1962), not existing, or directly experienced (Tolkien, 1964). However, imagination cannot be conceived, because there is no "other" world of imagination (Artaud, 1974). Imagination cannot be observed because it has no duration, determination, or force to act (Sartre, 1940). What we perceive as imagination is always already its report or elaboration (Fine, 1983). While imagination cannot be grasped, it continuously tends toward embodiment in order to be understood by individuals (Eco, 1986 [1973]), and fantasy thus emerges as this secondary elaboration (Jameson, 2005; Sartre, 1940).

BLURRING OF FANTASY AND REALITY

In line with views of a fragmented postmodern culture, consumer research has embraced the idea that there are no more clear-cut concepts of reality and fantasy (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kozinets, 2001; Kozinets et al., 2004; Penaloza, 2001). The former is commonly understood as the natural and physical possible world, while the latter is seen as physically not existing or even impossible (Paskow, 2004; Traill, 1996). As individuals recognize that reality and fantasy are subjectively constructed, both collapse into signs and representations, making the difference between them arbitrary and meaningless. Their distinction vanishes, and only their blur remains, creating one operational totality of hyper-reality (Baudrillard, 1995 [1981]).

Recent studies have opposed ideas of hyper-reality, showing consumers to perceive fantasy and reality as separate entities (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Rose & Wood, 2005; St. James et al., 2011). Reality is never perceived as imaginary by its beholders, even though norms differ significantly from culture to culture (Bonsu & Belk, 2003). Moreover, while fantasy can become meaningful, important, and authentic to individuals (Belk & Costa, 1998; Hirschman, 1988; Rose & Wood, 2005), its nature requires difference from reality (Illouz, 2009; Martin, 2004; Todorov, 1970; Tolkien, 1964). This would suggest that hyper-reality only holds true from a detached point of view (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

Fantasy and reality are not exclusive domains (Martin, 2004), but individuals continue to make subjective, yet very clear distinctions of the two on a social and personal level (Armitt, 1996; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Positing fantasy as indistinguishable from reality would make both concepts lose their sense (Sartre, 1940). Fantasy in the contemporary context may have become equal to (Jameson, 2005) and overlapping with reality (Martin, 2004), but the two are not equivalent. The difference between fantasy and reality remains, but has become extremely vague and contextual (Paskow, 2004; Traill, 1996). To explore the experience of fantasy, this study thus turns our attention to the relationship between fantasy and reality as understood and performed in consumers' everyday existence.

PERFORMANCE THEORY

In order to explore fantasy as embodied and socially negotiated, the study incorporates the perspective of performance theory, following which human

action and interaction can be seen as performances (Schechner, 2006). Performance emerges from the expression of our experience, which is very norm-bound, yet varied, and contextualized (Butler, 1990; Schechner, 2006). Repetition of behavior is never exact, as it has room for interpretation and misinterpretation (Schechner, 2006), creating a tension between the actual doing and the existing blueprint (Denzin, 2003; Schechner, 2006). Focusing on this tension, performances have been conceptualized as restored behavior, which consists of recreating and "recombining bits of previously behaved behaviors" (Schechner, 2006, p. 35). Performance is based on experience, and experience is the result of performance (Butler, 1990; Deighton, 1992).

The object of study of performance theory is behavior, its performance, and its performers within social contexts (Schechner, 2006). The focus is not on *whether* things are repeated, but rather *how* things are repeated in the fragmented and fluid contemporary cultural context (Butler, 1990; Carlson, 1996). Performance theory stresses action, process, and movement (Carlson, 1996; Denzin, 2003) by mapping out how behavior is deployed and oriented within individuals' lives (Carlson, 1996). From a performance theory point of view, understanding emerges through acting in and engaging with the context in a dynamic manner. It requires looking at choices and constraints, routines and their developments, as well as temporal and spatial, communal and individual aspects of behavior (Denzin, 2003).

ETHNOGRAPHY OF LIVE-ACTION ROLE PLAY

Heeding Eco's (1986 [1973]) insight that imagination must approach embodiment in order to be grasped, this study examines fantasy as is it performed in the plane between imagination and embodiment. The context of that performance is live action role-playing games (LARP). LARPs are face-to-face games that allow their players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in imaginary environments in actual time and space. As a context of study, LARPs provide access to individuals' interactions with and negotiation of fantasy elements in the creation of almost tangible fantasy environments, thus supporting the aims of this research. The nature of the imaginary LARP contexts which I have attended vary a lot in their themes, ranging from historic to future-oriented, and from utopian to dystopian with attempts of realism in between.

I have conducted participant observation in various LARPs during an 18-month period of fieldwork in Finland, Norway, and the United States, with the majority of the ethnographic work occurring in Finland. In addition to detailed field notes of participant observation of 32 LARPs to date, the data also consists of formal and informal interviews with players attending LARPs, as well as artifacts, such as game props and game materials. So far, I have conducted 16 formal interviews with LARPers recruited as key informants for their knowledge of the context. I have also done informal interviews, which consist of conversations engaged publicly in the course of LARP performances I have attended. The ethnographic work has been characterized by progressive contextualization (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and emergent design.

THE LARP PERFORMANCE

LARPs are themed games that allow their players to physically enter and immerse into a world of fantasy. The games are usually set in remote areas that are propped (i.e., equipped and decorated materially) to fit the chosen theme of the LARP. Before the event, participants are given characters with personalities, histories, social groups, and goals for the game. These are used as the starting point for the LARP itself, in which the various characteristics and goals are played out and developed. LARPs are not competitive and cannot be won, but their goal is rather to create an experience for the players. LARPs vary a lot in their themes, but they almost always involve contexts, plotlines, and characters that are based on popular culture and thus are very familiar to participants, who tend to be very knowledgeable of so-called "geek culture." The themes of the LARPs I have attended have included both direct use and combination of various media. Some LARPs were set in familiar narratives, such as *Harry Potter* or *The Walking Dead*. Others would mix elements of media to create a new setting, resulting in a vampire LARP or a medieval fantasy LARP.

Unlike LARP in many other parts of the world, LARP in Finland does not generally revolve around clubs, organizations, or even specific groups of people. Finnish LARPers form a fluid collection of people that participate in various kinds of games individually organized by different people all over the country. As a result, LARPers tend to take part in games that differ in themes, size, and participants. Most LARPers also prefer to try out different types of games and characters, which provides them with new

perspectives to archetypal scenarios. Character casting is rarely based on physical appearance and often breaks many everyday norms by letting LARPers play characters of a different age, race, and even gender.

Through participant observation in LARPs, it soon became evident to me that games do not only vary thematically, but they can also differ a lot in the experience and value that they give to the player. The value gained does depend on the elements of the LARP itself in many ways, including the organization of the game, the themes of the game, and the cooperation of all of the participants. For instance, my key informants have complained about having poor experiences in LARPs that had vague organization in terms of character goals. Nevertheless, the quality of the LARP experience appears to be most strongly connected to the players' own attitudes and life situations, and seems to develop with their involvement in the hobby.

LARPers tend to start out as more passive participants who seek playful and escapist experiences that include little reflection and are oriented toward personal pleasure and individual fantasies. Such players prefer the use of archetypes and clichés, and rarely want to diverge from direct use of media scripts and specific favorite worlds or characters. For example, in a Harry Potter themed LARP that I attended in southern Finland, the characters, plotlines, and the fantasy world were almost directly borrowed from the book and movie franchise. Most attendees were fans of Harry Potter and were very excited to immerse into their favorite fandom and to engage with their favorite characters. The escapist experience is more likely to result from LARPs which have cheerful and playful themes, and which place participants in worlds of fantasy media, such as *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, or *BattleStar Galactica*.

Over time, many LARPers become more active, taking charge and learning to manipulate various elements of LARPs. Rose, a key informant of mine whom I have interviewed on multiple occasions, has shown clear signs of becoming much more reflective of her experiences in LARP as well as taking on much more active roles in the games. LARPers become more reflective and aware of LARP processes, and start focusing more on creating shared and communal fantasy. Players become comfortable with mixing various media elements and trying out new plotlines, themes, and character types. Such experiences are more likely to emerge from LARPS that are ideological, political, and intertwined with real life problems, creating experiences that focus on events such as living in an occupied country. Experiences become more serious and focus less on passive entertainment. For instance, I took part in a short LARP in Norway, the setting of which was a mental institution, with the majority of LARPers performing

patient characters. From discussions after the LARP, I concluded that most players found the LARP to be very emotionally difficult and even scary, as the venue and themes were macabre. However, the experience also caused us to reflect on lives of real patients in such hospitals, as well as how we, as individuals, act toward other people in our day-to-day lives.

Based on these findings, I propose that LARP experiences exist in a continuum ranging from escapist and media-oriented games to activist, reflective, and thought-provoking games. The first type is more focused on leisure, fun, and escape from everyday life. The experience tends to be more directed at one's self and personal entertainment, with associated LARP themes using media archetypes and clichés directly. The latter type of LARP experience is directed at reflecting on the self and one's everyday life. The experience is more community-oriented and often sparks discussions over ideological, moral, and political issues.

It is important to note that while LARPers become more aware and reflexive of the various elements of LARP with prolonged involvement in the hobby, they do not always move toward the more thought-provoking types of experiences. I have noted that many players show a clear development from one type of LARP experience to the other through attending various LARPs. However, some LARPers consciously choose to stick to a type of game because of a preferred experience that is gained. LARPs more likely to provide escapist experiences can help individuals step out of their everyday lives, which they find boring, unsatisfactory, or even painful. On the other hand, engaging in LARPs that are more thought-provoking in their experience can aid in the development of personal ideologies or political movements.

DISCUSSION

LARP events and the fantasy that is performed through them vary in their experience and the value that they offer their participants. The experience of fantasy in various LARPs could be said to form a continuum that ranges from escapist entertainment to activist thought-provoking reflections tied into participants' everyday lives. Such a continuum of fantasy corresponds with Hume's (1984) four forms of fantasy. Hume (1984) studied various research fields' definitions of the concept, which she found to be diverse and even contradicting. She nevertheless found all definitions to consist of the same elements: world 1, author, work, audience, and world 2. In

LARP, these elements are represented accordingly as everyday life, the creators of LARP, the LARP performance, the players, and the fantasy created through LARP.

By taking this more inclusive perspective, Hume (1984) connected the varying and even contradicting definitions of fantasy through the five elements to construct four basic forms of fantasy: illusion, vision, revision, and disillusion. Each form of fantasy presents its own intentions, as well as an attitude, reaction, and relationship to both reality and imagination. The forms make up a typology, meaning that the different types of fantasy can overlap and shift in many ways (Hume, 1984).

Following Hume's (1984) typology, fantasy in the form of illusion retreats from and escapes everyday life to indulge people in a world of imagination. The aim of illusion fantasy is to comfort and entertain. It encourages passive acceptance with no critical awareness (Hume, 1984), which brings no educational or interrogative value, merely guiding an individual's gaze away from real problems (Fine, 1983; Hume, 1984). The form points to unfulfilled values, unable to challenge us or help us interpret our world (Hume, 1984). Stuck in an endlessly free-playing alternative world, illusion fantasy becomes self-referential and can create nothing more than what is already found within its parameters and conventions, limiting creativity and interpretation (Armitt, 1996). Such fantasy can nevertheless become far more gratifying than everyday life (Jameson, 2005), which causes people to get hooked on it (Campbell, 1987). The illusion form of fantasy is similar to escapist experiences of LARP, which are disconnected from LARPers' lives, but can offer distraction, stress relief, or just a break from boredom of everyday life. Fantasy in its illusion form can be used as short-term pain alleviation, but it has little long-lasting effects on people's lives.

Fantasy seems to often be equated with its illusion form, which, in turn, has become synonymous with entertainment and media (Eco, 1986 [1973]; McLuhan, 1964). Yet this pleasure-giving escapism only scratches the surface of the concept of fantasy (Jackson, 1981). Fantasy in the form of vision is based on the comparison and contrast of the lived world with an imaginary world. The aim is to comfort people in their understanding of their world in order to engage them in interpretation and stimulate their awareness. This results in a new sense of reality and recognition of detail that is normally missed (Hume, 1984), as individuals are allowed to envisage new possibilities (Hoogland, 2002). People are expected to recognize multiple truths, but not react to them (Hume, 1984). Such fantasy is seen in escapist experiences of LARP that introduce elements relevant to

LARPers' everyday lives, causing participants to reflect on these. In this way the performance of vision fantasy delivers a form of enrichment.

Fantasy in the form of revision is in many ways similar to the form of vision, with the key difference being revision's ability to push individuals to action. While vision remains more linked to imagination, revision focuses on questioning reality (Armitt, 1996; Hume, 1984). Vision's familiar comforting forms are exchanged for defamiliarized states (Armitt, 1996), and the aim shifts to disturbing individuals in order to get them engaged (Hume, 1984). Revision fantasy causes individuals to reconsider their living practices, thus threatening fixity and conformity to social order (Armitt, 1996; Hume, 1984). Unlike illusion and vision, revision can hold interest and attention even if the premise is not entertaining to individuals (Hume, 1984). This can be seen in the more thought-provoking experiences of LARP, in which the context and plotlines turn to more serious themes. These themes are not necessarily fun, but are nevertheless very interesting to participants, as they push them to confront various ideas and elements of their lives. Beyond mere enrichment, revision fantasy may thus lead to reflective identity work.

Fantasy in the form of disillusion completely rejects escapist entertainment and aims to liberate individuals from it by exaggerating, skewing, and/or smashing it (Hume, 1984). Disillusion calls to attention the limitations of reality, culture, and the communication skills used to convey these to our perception (Hume, 1984). Through focusing on defamiliarization of space and time, the disillusion form causes individuals to reassess their subjectivity and challenge perceived notions of contemporary reality (Armitt, 1996). The aim of the form is to disturb by creating a mirror to our own world that suggests instability, questioning, and critiquing our culture and ourselves without immediate social sanction (Hoogland, 2002; Hume, 1984). The effect is disengagement that does not try to substitute our reality in the way illusion or vision would, but rather aims to question and change our own world (Hume, 1984). The disillusion form emerges in the most extreme forms of thought-provoking LARP experiences, which are not entertaining, but cause participants to consciously reflect on and change their lives as well as their ideological, political, and moral viewpoints. The fantasy of disillusion is the most activist form of fantasy performance.

By exploring fantasy in the context of LARP, it became evident that the experience can take various forms within a continuum between escapism and activism. Escapist fantasy offers comfort and entertainment within a world one can step into while forgetting about everyday life, often supported by mainstream media. Such fantasy seems freeing, but is very much

tied down by norms and conventions, bringing little change or difference, and allowing the individual to be passive. Activist fantasy, on the other hand, is consciously reflexive of the reality around it, destabilizing, defamiliarizing, and even disturbing it. Its aim is to transgress norms and engage the individual by creating a critical distance toward their reality. People learn about themselves and their world, acknowledge hidden problems and desires, and gain agency to pursue goals in order to create change.

LARP experiences are rarely defined by either extreme and seem to work best when taking a form that balances the two, tweaked and adjusted to fit the context. Applying Suvin's (1988) work to the performance of fantasy in the LARP context, I propose that through the balance of both the entertainment of illusion and the critical distance of disillusion, a fantasy experience can result in a "cognitive horizon" that incorporates individuals and allows the realization of new possibilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Fantasy experience emerges as performance taking place between reality and imagination. Fantasy in itself is a part of neither, yet it is unable to exist independently of the two. It can be found in the gap between reality and imagination, which is created and extended by their interaction (following Armitt, 1996; Jackson, 1981; Todorov, 1970). Fantasy goes toward that which is unknown and does not exist, and connects it to what we know and believe to be present in our reality (Paskow, 2004; Suvin, 1979; Tolkien, 1964).

The fantasy experience takes on different forms, ranging from escapism to activism, with each type incorporating different intentions, attitudes, and reactions of individuals, as well as correlating with consumers' life situations and needs. The different forms of fantasy cut across media and genre, and are based on different relationships to and attitudes toward reality and imagination. The experiences result in varied effects, provide different values, and have distinct practical implications in individuals' lives. Understanding the different experiences and relationships that fantasy can provide numerous implications to consumer behavior and marketing research, giving insight to how consumption experiences, consumption communities, as well as customer and brand relationships are created. Future research needs to explore in more detail how fantasy is experienced by individuals, and how its various forms affect and tie into consumers' everyday lives.

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NARCISSISM AND THE CONSUMING SELF: AN EXPLORATION OF CONSUMER IDENTITY PROJECTS AND NARCISSISTIC TENDENCIES

Aliette Lambert, John Desmond and Stephanie O'Donohoe

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The purpose of this study is to investigate narcissism in relation to consumer identity projects. Narcissism is rarely the focus of consumer culture studies, though it resonates with theories of individualistic, consumption-driven identities, and is argued to be a pervasive social trend within a hegemonic consumer culture that places the individual center stage. We explore these themes in the context of emerging adult identity projects given arguments about increasing narcissism in younger generations.*

Methodology/approach – *Identifying eight participants using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory – four with high and four with low*

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scores – we conduct in-depth interviews to explore their identity projects, narcissistic traits, and brand relationships.

Findings – *Through idiographic analysis, we find that those with lower narcissistic tendencies seem to have a communal orientation to both people and brands, whilst those with greater narcissistic tendencies tend to be individualistic and agentic. We relate the narcissistic consumer to Fromm's "marketing character," proposing four themes that emerge from the analysis: liquidity; an other-directed sense of self; conformity; and the commodification of self.*

Social implications – *This paper discusses the societal implications of individualistic consumer identity projects, highlighting narcissism, a concept relatively neglected within consumer culture theory. Narcissism carries with it a host of societal implications, not least of which is a focus on the self and a lack of concern with the wellbeing of others.*

Keywords: Narcissism; identity; emerging adults; consumer identity projects; brands; consumer culture

For contemporary cartographers of consumer culture, narcissism seems to be uncharted terrain in maps of identity projects, marked out with little more than the legend "here be dragons." This is surprising, since the individualistic, self-validating nature of this psychological construct links it inextricably to the late-modern consumer identity project and resonates with important themes in consumer culture theory (CCT) such as materialism (Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992), consumer desire (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003), and consumer–brand relationships (Lambert & Desmond, 2013). Despite this, narcissism is rarely addressed within CCT. Our study thus explores narcissistic tendencies (defined broadly as an unhealthy preoccupation with the self and as such a lack of concern for others; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) as part of emerging adult identity projects, since younger generations have been characterized as particularly preoccupied with self-image and self-expression to the detriment of social relationships and community (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Indeed, Arnett (2004) notes that emerging adults, experiencing a lengthy liminal space between adolescence and full adult responsibilities, are profoundly self-focused and engaged in identity explorations, deeply conscious of the instability and opportunities associated with this stage of their life course.

Before presenting the study's methodology, findings, and implications, we outline a theoretical foundation based on consumer identity projects, narcissism, and consumption, and we highlight the traces of narcissism to be found within existing CCT literature.

CONSUMER IDENTITY PROJECTS, NARCISSISM AND CONSUMPTION

A key tenet of the CCT tradition is the consumption-oriented nature of identity projects and expression of self (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988, 2013). For example, Firat and Venkatesh's theory of liberatory postmodernism is based on the premise that, as traditional societal structures disintegrate, identity construction through consumption becomes prevalent; therefore, individuals no longer need to be "seeking or conforming to one sense or experience of being" (1995, p. 253). Thus, consumers are given the means to "creatively construct and express the multitude of identities that are open to them" (Shankar & Fitchett, 2002, p. 512). Whereas some may argue that a consumption-oriented identity project "is increasingly becoming a productive process, goal orientated and purposeful" leading to an enhanced self-consciousness (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Kellner, 1995), others associate the postmodern consumer with an emptiness or feeling of loss (Cushman, 1990), unfulfilling superficiality (Featherstone, 2007; Jameson, 1983), and narcissistic display (Baudrillard, 1998; Lasch, 1979). This depicts the postmodern character as multiphrenetic (Thompson & Hirschman, 1998), faced with a constantly evolving consumer culture, beset with mediated experiences (Giddens, 1991), and sometimes retreating to narcissistic preoccupation in the absence of a stable sense of self (Slater, 1997). On this note, Slater finds post-traditional society "self-obsessed" in that "at the limit point – 'narcissism' – other people and social relations are perceived only in terms of their implications for maintaining a coherent self-identity" (1997, p. 91).

The above suggests that the "dark-side" of consumer identity projects – including the potential development of narcissistic tendencies – merits further attention. From early psychoanalytic literature to more recent psychological accounts of the subject, the psychogenetic structure of the narcissist is portrayed as a specific character emerging in response to a particular consumption-related social formation (Elias, 1994/1939). This is evidenced by Fromm's account of the marketing character: "Modern

consumers may identify themselves by the formula: *I am = what I have and what I consume*" (1976, p. 36; emphasis added). Fromm's description chimes with the "other-directed" character described by Riesman (1961) – that is, the depthless chameleon effortlessly adjusting her self-presentation to meet the changing requirements of the personality market, and responding to growing urbanization and years of mass advertising which heightened anxieties linked to social approval (Ewen, 1976; Riesman, 1961). This reflects the narcissist's deep insecurities as "the other-directed person wants to be loved rather than esteemed" (Riesman, 1961, p. xx), or, in Lacan's theory of narcissism, one who lacks a "center of self" and thus seeks continual external affirmation (Eagleton, 1983; Slater, 1997). Fromm (1976) associates the (narcissistic) marketing character with the "having" mode, comprising alienated and destructive impulses as well as an instrumental relation to others, in contrast to the non-narcissistic "being" mode, which is at one with, and centered on, other people. Fromm's "having" and "being" modes echo the dichotomy between instrumental and terminal materialism described by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981). Although the latter's terminology could be misinterpreted as equating instrumental materialism with Fromm's instrumentality, it refers to the opposite tendency, whereby objects are used to cultivate the self and connect with other people. This suggests a homology between "being/instrumental" versus "having/terminal" orientations to objects. A similar distinction is made by recent authors on materialism (Kasser, 2003; Kasser & Kanner, 2004), who argue that "materialism is one of the most obvious examples of America's narcissism epidemic" (Twenge & Campbell, 2009, p. 160). From a different theoretical perspective, Lasch (1979) – influenced by Melanie Klein's theory of infantile aggression related to narcissism – also links marketing to narcissism, arguing that marketing places the consumer center stage, promising instant gratification. Commodities are also central to the undermining of traditional forms of authority that counter narcissism, employed by youth and women as forms of "pseudo-emancipation." Klein also influenced Kernberg (1975) whose work contributed to the development of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, or NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the principal quantitative tool for measuring narcissism (see Appendix). Recent empirical research utilizing the NPI suggests that narcissism is endemic in Western cultures and contagious to others (Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008).

The authors whose work is outlined above link narcissism to consumer society in various ways. A narrow reading pins most of the blame on advertising and marketing practices, which place individual consumers center

stage, fueling their sense of entitlement and grandiosity by seeking to meet their needs instantly. A broader explanation, drawing on "the context of context" (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), locates these marketplace practices as part of a cultural consolidation including the pervasive effects of celebrity culture, reality TV, and me-centered media. If "consumption addresses the alienated qualities of modern social life … [and] promises the very things the narcissist desires – attractiveness, beauty and personal popularity – through the consumption of the 'right' kinds of goods and services" (Giddens, 1991, p. 172), the narcissist may be the foundational character of CCT and the shallow heart of an identity grounded in consumption (Featherstone, 2007). Indeed, many prominent CCT studies have either alluded to or been predicated on narcissistic consumption. For example, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 413) link the emergence of the individual consumer to the loss of traditional community, arguing that these individuals band together to worship the brands they love, which are typically a reflection of *individual* identity. Though seeking to position brand communities as a means of achieving post-traditional collectives, their observation has a rather narcissistic undertone: "Brand communities have a relatively hedonistic and liberatory ethos, where pleasure is more sanctioned than restricted, and where bounded individuality is celebrated" (2001, p. 427). An undercurrent of narcissism also runs through their findings, since the consumption practices highlighted by Muniz and O'Guinn are light touch and highly visible, reflecting the narcissistic preoccupation with image building and being perceived positively. Potential traces of narcissism are also evident in other influential papers in this tradition, particularly in accounts of the "postmodern" consumer. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) discuss how, in a postmodern setting, each member of a family can eat whatever s/he wants at any given time, watch on television whatever s/he wants, jog where s/he wants, and listen to what s/he wants while doing so, whilst a cartoon depicts a woman preparing for a date and describes the money she has invested into her psychic and physical self to prepare for the single occasion. Similarly, Fournier (1998, p. 360) describes Vicki, the youngest of her participants, as: "a product of a postmodern society that encourages construction of highly individuated identities through eclectic borrowing of the fragments available in consumer culture." Vicki's shallow and instrumental commitments to people and things are consistent with a narcissistic orientation (Lambert & Desmond, 2013). Furthermore, Goulding, Shankar, Elliott, and Canniford (2009, p. 776) evoke Lasch's (1979) observation of the narcissism of rebellious youth in describing the illicit pleasure in raves, observing: "Those clubbers who gyrate on podiums

or in cages suspended above the dance floor evoke the idea of the obverse panopticon, 'a physical structure designed specifically to enable the consumer's desire to be observed'." The exhibitionism of these young dancers, which Twenge and Campbell (2009) argue is magnified to an unprecedented degree by social media performances, links to status games. Moreover, Kates (2002) describes how gay men engage in a highly competitive local status game based on displaying their bodies, clothes, and appearance. Echoing these themes, Belk's et al. (2003, p. 335) study on consumer desire is predicated on the modern subject, for whom there is "an increased respect for choice and personal freedom to act as one pleases," or to be "ready to pursue the human potential of desire."

METHODOLOGY

The above discussion raises questions about the extent to which narcissism is CCT's elephant in the room, potentially leading to a more fragmented, and underdeveloped account of consumer identity projects. In this paper, we seek to understand how narcissistic tendencies shape orientations to people and brands as part of the developing identity projects of emerging adults. Specifically, we aim to explore the role of narcissism in developing identity projects and relationships with both people and brands.

In order to address these research objectives, we adopt a qualitative, idiographic approach. Purposive sampling of emerging adults (Arnett, 2004) served to leverage greater insight on narcissism and consumption. Those currently in the emerging adult life stage are Generation Y consumers, the segment considered by Twenge et al. (2008, p. 891) to have the highest rates of narcissism, and to view fame, materialism, and wealth as important goals. If the current cohort of emerging adults is indeed more narcissistic and materialistic, they are particularly relevant in the context of narcissistic consumption.

Many recent studies on narcissism are based on survey or experimental designs (Kasser, 2003; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), which, while robust, lack ecological validity and tend to over-simplify. In contrast, we adopt a qualitative approach, though our sample is drawn from individuals labeled as high or low in narcissism according to the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Observations and interviews enable a more nuanced understanding of a person, guarding against simplification and stereotypical closure. Although most NPI research relies on composite scores, our focus on individuals

allowed us to explore variations in the relative weighting of components. Moreover, adopting a CCT lens and method to explore a sample gathered using the predominant quantitative tool – methods seemingly at odds – allows for a complementary analysis of narcissism, offering greater insights into how narcissism relates to consumer culture.

We first distributed the NPI to two groups of postgraduate students (26 males and 27 females) attending a UK university. It is important to note that many students at this particular university are from affluent backgrounds, as reflected in the findings. Four students from each group, two from the top-scoring 10% and two from the lowest-scoring 10% were invited to participate in the second phase. This involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews revolving around: background and life history; the NPI traits of entitlement, vanity, self-sufficiency, authority, exploitativeness, superiority, and exhibitionism (Raskin & Terry, 1988); and each participant's relationships with objects and brands. Where possible, interviews were conducted in participants' home to enable "show and tell" with regards to products. There was a focus on brands in the interview, as brands are the ultimate signifier in a postmodern setting (Baudrillard, 1998). The researcher (the first author) was casually acquainted with the male participants; she had some prior understanding of their social context and actions, and some mutual trust had already been developed, lending richness to the data. The researcher was not previously acquainted with the female participants, but efforts to build rapport were aided by the researcher's prior experience as a student in the institution and familiarity with its particular cultural milieu. All interviews were transcribed and case studies were written for each participant. Data analysis was conducted using an idiographic method (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989) to attain a holistic understanding of participant experience.

FINDINGS

Sampling

The figure summarizes the findings from the sampling phase (Fig. 1). Notably, we found higher rates of narcissism in both samples than in previous studies, though the sample size was notably smaller. NPI scores averaged 17 (17.5 for males and 16.5 for females), whereas Foster, Campbell, and Twenge (2003, p. 478) report mean scores of 16.5 for men and 14.7 for

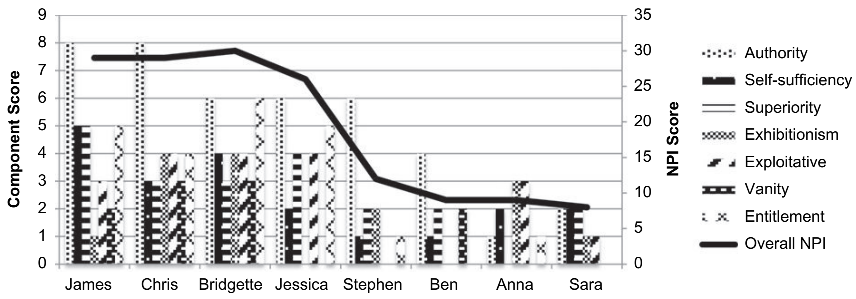

Fig. 1. NPI Scores for Participants.

women. The higher scores for men in our study are consistent with findings that men typically exhibit greater narcissistic tendencies than women (Foster et al., 2003), which may be attributed to male socialization as independent and female socialization as interdependent (Cross & Madson, 1997). In terms of nationality, Foster et al.'s (2003) scores were 15.3 for Americans and 15.0 for Europeans. For this study, reflecting the international profile of postgraduates at this university, all participants are of German or Austrian descent (and aged 21–25), apart from Jessica who is Indonesian and spent the past five years studying in Australia and the United Kingdom. She was included because of her particularly high-NPI score of 26, not typical for Asian cultures (13.75 for Asians compared to 15.77 for Whites, see Twenge & Foster, 2008). It transpired that she was a friend of two female German participants.

Interviews

The following sections explore emerging adults' accounts of their narcissistic or non-narcissistic tendencies, comparing those with high- and low-NPI scores. Lambert and Desmond (2013) explored only young men's accounts, but the findings here suggest that high-NPI women as well as men exhibit individualistic identity projects through agentic relationships with people and brands, whilst low scoring participants gravitated toward a communal orientation to people and brands. Not surprisingly, each participant demonstrated engagement with consumer culture through an array of brands that express her or his sense of self. For example, when asked about brands and shopping, Anna responds enthusiastically: "*I love it! … It just makes me happy to buy [brands]!*" Indicative of an emerging adult identity

in transition (Arnett, 2004; Schouten, 1991), different versions of the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986) are enacted through product use. Thus, James uses products to signal his future life goals, and seems to project an ideal self in the brands that he purchases: "I have one brand … once I earn money, I'll totally buy this brand all the time. It's van Laack … This shirt is just so me, as you can tell." Bridgette's ideal self is also mirrored in her brand choices. She mentions twice her admiration for Nadja Swarovski, an executive of Swarovski Crystal. Bridgette describes: "She's like this really prestigious, you know, really organized, very feminine and, you know, very glamorous lady but she's very tough at the same time." She later shares her adoration of the brand: "I love Swarovski because I can identify myself with it." There are many other examples of products used to express transitional identity, signaling aspects of participants' actual selves and aspects of the selves they hope to become.

High-NPI Participants

The four participants with high-NPI scores presented themselves as – to a greater or lesser extent – agentic with both brands and people, expressing identity through "I have" rather than "I am" (Fromm, 1976). Jessica explains that she is not a team-worker. Unwilling to compromise, she wants to have things her way, which is something she attributes to being an only child. She frequently engages in what she calls "diplomatic manipulation" in social situations to get her way without confrontation – she sees this as "the Asian way." Whilst saying that she craves acknowledgment and respect, Jessica does not trust others and prefers to remain solitary. She "doesn't believe" in the notion of best friendship and has learned from her father only to trust blood relatives. Similarly, Bridgette exhibits a classically driven and instrumental relation to others: "I strive for winning … When I want to do something and I decide for it, I throw myself into it 100%. It normally works out." She sees herself as headstrong, competitive, and rebellious. If her parents "… told me don't touch the stove, I'd touch it." She believes she is habitually treated unfairly by others, but does not understand why. She has memories of hating the other girls at school, whom she describes as bitchy. She doesn't understand why they teased and now she doesn't keep contact. Even the friends that she made at school eventually "turned against her": "It was the two of us until the last year and then she also turned on me." While Bridgette may seem uncompromising, she does not see herself in that way: "I can adapt to situations really well … I can

adapt to [people] because I can understand them and I connect very well because I just like talk to them and try to get closer to them." Though Bridgette seems to have many friends, she does not refer to close, deep relationships. Male participants also exhibit agentic relationships with others. For example, Chris has no compunction in using women romantically; he tries "not to hurt women," but when he is sure "it's only for fun," then "this is part of the game."

In terms of brand relationships, these participants tend to use brands as required, without exhibiting strong loyalties. Moreover, brand choice tends to be individual, with little influence from others. For example, Jessica is very conscious of how she should dress given a situation or an audience. She is reluctant to acknowledge her friends' or mom's opinion, opting to purchase clothes separately when on shopping excursions in order to avoid confrontation. She worries about how she is portrayed and strives to be the center of attention. She expresses insecurity about her physical appearance: "I always feel like I'm fat … I don't really like looking into mirrors because I feel I'm imperfect." Jessica is very conscious of brand choice. For instance, her favorite brand of shoes is Salvatore Ferragamo, because it subtly portrays an image of timeless elegance, rather than identifying her more crassly with money. However, when she wants to appear more fashionable, she may wear her Christian Louboutins, which are "essential" at certain social events because they are "fashion forward" and depict her as a "sassy girl." She owns Louboutin shoes simply because sometimes their red sole feels like a social necessity; she actually prefers the quality of Jimmy Choos. Products thus seem to play an instrumental role in Jessica's quest for respect, acknowledgment and, inevitably, a feeling of superiority. In fact, she comments that she strives to be a "trophy friend," as she enjoys the feeling that "people feel proud when they are, uh, close to me." Similarly, James notes that he doesn't mind if his peer group isn't familiar with his name-brand items, citing many brands that "you'll hear if you've got more money." Furthermore, he uses items agentically: he claims extreme loyalty to every single brand that he uses, yet has no trouble replacing that brand when something better comes along. One example is his Rimowa suitcase, for which he dropped a long-term relationship with Samsonite. In contrast to the other high-NPI participants, Bridgette does not express an agentic relationship with brands. However, she is loyal to brands – particularly clothing and make-up – that may be considered luxury and in line with expectations of her peer group.

Low-NPI Participants

Participants scoring low on the NPI exhibited a starkly different identity orientation to the participants discussed above: that is, a communal orientation to people and things. For example, Anna sees herself as very much in the role of team-worker; she does not perceive herself to be very self-sufficient, at times relying "too much" on the opinions of family and friends for reassurance. Friends are very important to both Anna and Sara. Anna's friends at college are not so settled as those at home, but nevertheless she has formed family-like friendships at the university and plans to travel with these friends before starting her next job. Sara values her friendships with others, showing the researcher photos of her closest friends, describing each in great detail. She says that she rarely fights with her friends, preferring to adopt a placatory role by refusing to become involved in disputes which she considers disloyal, even when this irritates others. She believes in karma – if she does "good" for others, then she will experience good things herself. In her postgraduate experience, Sara especially values Jessica as a good friend with whom she exchanges gifts: "I never expected to find that close friends here in [UK University] who's so much like me. Sometimes it's too shocking because we are too similar." Jessica on the other hand, hardly mentions Sara and does not reference their gift-giving ritual, though Sara expected her to do so. The male participants share a similar sentiment when speaking of others. Stephen notes that he is always looking for harmony in his relationships and prefers "to discuss the ideas" than impose his thoughts on others, whilst Ben treasures the opinions of his family and very close group of friends, calling his father his "hero."

When it comes to brands, each participant demonstrated a deep loyalty both to products they have used long-term and brands used within their families. For example, Anna habitually buys Zara, her favorite brand, because it is cheap and she likes the style. She emphasizes that her relationship with Zara goes back 10 years, saying that she sticks with them "through thick and thin," even despite a child-labor scandal which put her off, as she admits "then I see a Zara and just have to buy it!" Sara is very conscious of the impression she gives others when it comes to the brands that she displays, even brands to which she is very loyal. For example, she prefers "preppy" brands that she has used since childhood, such as Ralph Lauren, and wears those labels around certain friends, but prefers high-street brands such as Zara or Massimo Dutti when "contacting with everyday, normal people" in order to fit in and be "young, colorful." This

indicates Sara's tendency to conform to group standards: "The real Sara is actually more of the preppy Sara, yeah. But … I try to be more like the others, like down to earth, try to wear [All-Star] Chucks." Both male participants express similar themes, albeit in different ways. Ben, for example, does not express much interest in brands, besides Adidas as the brand sponsors his favorite sports team, but does prefer to keep a clean, classic appearance – a value instilled by his mother – through brands that are tried, tested, and often dating from childhood, such as Nivea and Hugo Boss. Stephen is also very loyal to brands that serve him well, and uses brands to express his love for vintage products and styles. For example, he orders Abercrombie and Fitch from the United States because, despite his dislike of the brand image and store ambience, he feels the clothing match his vintage style best. Thus, it is evident with these participants that there is a harmonizing and other-oriented approach to both things and people, expressed through brand loyalty and a desire to make others happy.

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that the narcissistic identity project is one of display, social validation, and superiority; relationships with people and brands tend to be agentic and non-reciprocal, serving to strengthen self-concept and bolster self-esteem. The identity projects of those associated with low narcissistic tendencies were markedly different, as these appeared bound up with a sense of communality and compassion for people and an affinity with specific products and brands. Four themes emerge from analysis of the data presented above as contributing to the construct of the narcissistic consumer: liquidity; the other-directed self; conformity; and commodification of self.

Liquidity

Narcissists are said to love and care for themselves alone; they pursue an instrumental approach to relationships, using others as fuel to power their self-esteem and status, casually casting them aside when someone better comes along (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). We suggest that narcissistic consumer–brand relationships follow a similar pattern; indeed, in this respect, those with greater narcissistic

tendencies seem to share the liquid relationship with possessions identified by Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould (2012, p. 523) in their study of global nomads, who "tend to form situational attachments to objects, appreciate objects primarily for their instrumental use-value." We suggest that preserving a "cool" image is vitally important to the emerging adult narcissist, who uses consumer goods as trappings to validate an overwhelmingly positive self-belief. Using brands to portray themselves in the best possible light, narcissists seem willing to sacrifice utilitarian values for symbolic values associated with luxury and prestige (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007, 2011). The narcissist may express undying loyalty to a brand as long as it maximizes his or her status, but once it slips out of fashion, we might expect the narcissist to move on, as seems to be the case with James, Chris, and Jessica. Although at first glance this seems to align with terminal materialism (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) – consuming for the sake of consuming – our findings suggest that in the moment, consumption is purposive, used for a signaling status to gain recognition. This aligns with a situational, "light" attachment, and thus a liquid orientation, to things (Bardhi et al., 2012; Bauman, 2000).

The Other-Directed Self

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analogy suggests that we present ourselves in different ways depending on our audience. According to Slater (1997, p. 89), this perpetuates an "over-socialized self" that internalizes the point of view of external others. Lacan (1988) and Girard (1987) postulate that even when one is speaking of individuals, there is always another present, whether as model, rival, or judge of one's behavior. The individual must thus reconcile the expectations of the ideal self (*who I should be*) with the reality of the actual self (*who I am*). On this note, Berger (1972, p. 132–3) expounds: "Being envied is a solitary form of reassurance. It depends precisely upon not sharing your experience with those who envy you. You are observed with interest but you do not observe with interest – if you do, you will become less enviable." Given their debt to Lacan, it is unsurprising that we agree with McRobbie's (2008) arguments that for younger generations in particular, consumer culture acts as a regime of truth, defined by Butler (2005, p. 22) as that which "offers the terms that make self-recognition possible." This does not simply create dissonance, given that aspects (or the whole) of the ideal self as seen in others may be far removed from the actual self, resulting in anxiety, frustration, and/or inadequacy.

Rather, that dissonance can be mobilized to build the self; depending on the position one assumes in this potential hell of mirrors, the other can be seen as an arrogant oppressor, or even as a miserable worm that one feels ashamed to be associated with, manifesting in "bypassed shame" (Giddens, 1991; Lewis, 1971) or the "unconsciously experienced anxieties about inadequacies of self" (Giddens, 1991, p. 65). Of course, if a person perceives that s/he is being observed continually by others, s/he may, like Sara in this study, use resources within consumer culture for social advancement (Slater, 1997). But at extremes, feeling continually under surveillance may lead to the "more dangerous" narcissistic tendency to "seek their *real* selves in their consumption, appearance and social performance" (Slater 1997, p. 88, citing Sennett). Emerging adults' heavy engagement in social networking and photo-sharing sites (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Ofcom, 2013, p. 296) may lead to a sense of constant surveillance, contributing to what we term the *narcissisification* of consumer culture and consumption experiences. Indeed, a tendency to seek a "real" self in things (through the opinions of others) was found among those with both high- and low-NPI scores in this study, although it was more marked among those participants with higher NPI scores. Participants' identities, future goals, and anxieties about the self were all expressed through consumption practices, with a liquid relationship with possessions particularly noticeable among the participants with greater narcissistic tendencies.

Conformity

Narcissists are generally reported to have a strong sense of agency, often associated with a number of character flaws. They are described as prone to self-serving bias, quick to take credit for the achievement of others and to blame others when things go wrong (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliott, & Gregg, 2002). They seek status in social settings (Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990), find antagonism motivating (Morf, Weir, & Davidov, 2000) and do not hesitate to punish those who criticize them (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Such an account resonates with Bridgette's cultivation of antagonistic relations. Superiority and status also feature much more prominently for Jessica and James than for Sara, Anna, Ben, or Stephen. We can further align these findings to the theme of conformity: by engaging in such behavior described above, the narcissist both participates in and perpetuates a standard of conformity. We observe trends of conformism with our participants (although this differs from Holt's (2002)

reference to the consumer as marketing dupe). First, it can be argued that all of our participants engage in socially validated consumption of similar type "luxury" brands. Even our most "alternative" participant, Stephen, who is very keen on vintage items and style, wears mostly Abercrombie and Fitch. Moreover, all of the participants, with the exception of James who "hates" Steve Jobs, own Apple computers. Perhaps reflecting the relatively affluent sample, all the women own signature Louis Vuitton bags that are about five-years old – each takes perfect care of this bag, each admits that she desired it because "everyone had it" but hates it now for that very reason, and each now carries a Longchamp bag. Another example lies with Bridgette. She sees herself as quite rebellious and different from others: "I always lived up to that extent I think in my whole life. It explains a lot. Being different. Setting like a statement." But, as noted above, many of the brands she consumes are in line with those of the other female participants. Furthermore, she acknowledges: "Here, in front of other people … I always like wear something proper … I don't want other people to think bad about me." Whilst narcissists tend to "set" trends (Twenge & Campbell, 2009), they do so while conforming to standards of peer acceptance. They encourage others to participate through acts of judging and shaming, however covert, as explained above. On this note, Baudrillard (1998, p. 95) postulates that consumer society is not about "freedom" to express a sense of self (as argued by Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), since it encourages conformism: "The narcissism of the individual in consumer society is not an enjoyment of singularity; it is a refraction of collective features. […] The individual is everywhere invited, primarily, to enjoy himself, to indulge himself. The understanding is that it is by pleasing oneself that one is likely to please others."

Considering conformity in this context affords tantalizing glimpses of narcissism in previous CCT studies. Belk et al. (2003, pp. 343–4) found longing for objects relates to a desire to be recognized by others, which resonates with accounts of the narcissist: "This longing for the social positions and relationships that are foundations for the value of desired objects also became evident with the projective responses to swimming in a sea of desired objects. Citations not of things but of people suggest that the sea of desire is a sea of human connections." Kozinets (2002, p. 36) suggests that the celebratory, "anti-consumption" event of Burning Man, is actually "a more personally enriching youtopia – a good place for me to be myself, and you to be yourself, together." Such freedom is circumscribed by pressures to conform, however: "The peer pressure to remind and shame people into participating in a way that would be recognized by others as

acceptable … was at a near fever pitch throughout the entire event … people indicated that they were constantly judging others in terms of the degree of their participation in the event" (2002, p. 25). Such conforming tendencies align with the other-directed identity orientation and narcissistic preoccupation with displaying oneself to receive recognition from others.

The Commodification of Self

The liquid nature of brand relationships, the other-directed nature of the self and the intrinsic conformism of the narcissistic consumer identity project resonate with Fromm's (1976) concept of the marketing character, which is no more than what s/he consumes. We suggest that the narcissistic character is also the archetypal marketing character, since narcissists "recast themselves as commodities" (Bauman, 2007, p. 6). In other words, for narcissistic consumers, "what is assumed to be the *materialization* of the inner truth of self is in fact an *idealization* of the material – objectified – traces of consumer choices" (2007, p. 15). Bauman (2001, p. 13) argues that a consumer society doesn't exist to serve needs, basic, or existential: "[t]he *spiritus movens* of consumer activity is not a set of articulated, let alone fixed, needs, but desire." Fostering desire perpetuates a consumption-driven identity project and what Featherstone (2007) termed the paper-chase effect, or a constant preoccupation with maintaining a socially accepted appearance or identity, which was reflected in our study by the previous example of the female participants who sought to "keep up" with trends by updating their "outdated" Louis Vuitton bag to the accepted Longchamp brand. From a CCT perspective, Belk et al. (2003) observe that their participants seek happiness in something "infinitely better" than what they have. As such, " … much of our consumer behavior appears better characterized as the pursuit not only of desired objects, but of desire itself" (p. 345). This perpetuates a "to have" ideal, turning self into "I am = what I have and what I consume" (Fromm, 1976) – and we add, "what I desire." Though non-narcissists may be equally implicated in the perpetuation of image and desire by a consumer society, this appears to be mitigated by their concern for the wellbeing of others, evident in our study. This thus casts participants with less tendency toward narcissism as "being/instrumental" and participants with increased tendency toward narcissism as the marketing character associated with "having/terminal" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Fromm, 1976).

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the construct of narcissism in the developing identity projects of emerging adults, setting forth a framework of the narcissistic consumer as a conforming subject engaging in liquid relationships and performance of self, thus embodying traits of marketing character in search of social validation given an other-directed sense of self. Though consumer identity projects can and do offer opportunities for self-expression, the "dark-side" caveats such as narcissism must be further explored in order to understand the risks along with the benefits. In that vein, this study begins to demonstrate how the concept of narcissism can contribute to a more nuanced account of materialism. Given the exploratory nature of this study, we readily acknowledge its limitations (not least in terms of sample size and nationality), but we hope our tentative voyage towards the edge of the map suggests the theoretical treasures rather than dangerous dragons to be found there.

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APPENDIX: NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY INVENTORY

Instructions: Here you'll find a list of 40 statements, one in Column A and the opposite in Column B. For each statement, choose the item from Column A or B that *best matches you* (even if it's not a perfect fit). Complete the quiz on your own and in one sitting, which takes most people between 5 and 10 minutes to finish. Answer all questions for the most accurate result.

Gender: M or F *Age*: ___

1. A. I have a natural talent for influencing people.	B. I am not good at influencing people.
2. A. Modesty doesn't become me.	B. I am essentially a modest person.
3. A. I would do almost anything on a dare.	B. I tend to be a fairly cautious person.
4. A. When people compliment me I sometimes get embarrassed.	B. I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.
5. A. The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.	B. If I ruled the world it would be a better place.
6. A. I can usually talk my way out of anything.	B. I try to accept the consequences of my behaviour.
7. A. I prefer to blend in with the crowd.	B. I like to be the centre of attention.
8. A. I will be a success.	B. I am not too concerned about success.
9. A. I am no better or worse than most people.	B. I think I am a special person.
10. A. I am not sure if I would make a good leader.	B. I see myself as a good leader.
11. A. I am assertive.	B. I wish I were more assertive.
12. A. I like to have authority over other people.	B. I don't mind following orders.
13. A. I find it easy to manipulate people.	B. I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.
14. A. I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.	B. I usually get the respect that I deserve.
15. A. I don't particularly like to show off my body.	B. I like to show off my body.
16. A. I can read people like a book.	B. People are sometimes hard to understand.

17. A. If I feel competent I am willing to take responsibility for making decisions.	B. I like to take responsibility for making decisions.
18. A. I just want to be reasonably happy.	B. I want to amount to something in the eyes of the world.
19. A. My body is nothing special.	B. I like to look at my body.
20. A. I try not to be a show off.	B. I will usually show off if I get the chance.
21. A. I always know what I am doing.	B. Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing.
22. A. I sometimes depend on people to get things done.	B. I rarely depend on anyone else to get things done.
23. A. Sometimes I tell good stories.	B. Everybody likes to hear my stories.
24. A. I expect a great deal from other people.	B. I like to do things for other people.
25. A. I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.	B. I take my satisfactions as they come.
26. A. Compliments embarrass me.	B. I like to be complimented.
27. A. I have a strong will to power.	B. Power for its own sake doesn't interest me.
28. A. I don't care about new fads and fashions.	B. I like to start new fads and fashions.
29. A. I like to look at myself in the mirror.	B. I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror.
30. A. I really like to be the centre of attention.	B. It makes me uncomfortable to be the centre of attention.
31. A. I can live my life in any way I want to.	B. People can't always live their lives in terms of what they want.
32. A. Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me.	B. People always seem to recognize my authority.
33. A. I would prefer to be a leader.	B. It makes little difference to me whether I am a leader or not.
34. A. I am going to be a great person.	B. I hope I am going to be successful.
35. A. People sometimes believe what I tell them.	B. I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.
36. A. I am a born leader.	B. Leadership is a quality that takes a long time to develop.

37. A. I wish somebody would someday write my biography.	B. I don't like people to pry into my life for any reason.
38. A. I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.	B. I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go out in public.
39. A. I am more capable than other people.	B. There is a lot that I can learn from other people.
40. A. I am much like everybody else.	B. I am an extraordinary person.

REVISITING (NOT SO) COMMONPLACE IDEAS ABOUT THE BODY: TOPIA, UTOPIA AND HETEROTOPIA IN THE WORLD OF TATTOOING

Dominique Roux

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *This paper brings a fresh contribution to the role of space and places in Consumer Culture Theory. Investigating the context of tattooing, it conceptualizes the various articulations that link the body as a topia and a utopia, and the street shops (as "other" places or heterotopia) where consumers' identity projects are undertaken.*

Methodology/approach – *Our approach is based on an ethnographic work, that is, the observation of the shop and interviews conducted with its two managers, three male tattooists, and a young female apprentice.*

Findings – *We show how the changes that affect heterotopic places in the world of tattooing impact the way body identity projects are taken care of. We highlight the material and symbolic exchanges that "take*

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place" and "make place" between the shop as a heterotopia and people's utopias of the body.

Research limitations/implications – *The research involves a single fieldwork and deliberately focuses on the female apprentice as the main informant of this study.*

Social implications – *This paper draws attentions to the emergence of women in the world of tattooing and their transformative role of highly gendered meanings and practices.*

Originality/value of paper – *In articulating the links between bodies, their utopias and heterotopic places where these are carried out, we contribute not only to the understanding of the meaning that consumers attribute to the transformation of their body, but also to the role played by spaces – sites as well as gendered bodies – in our understanding of these phenomena.*

Keywords: Research paper; place; tattooing; body; identity project; heterotopia

My body is like the City of the Sun, it has no place, but from it there emerge and radiate all possible places, real or utopian.

— Michel Foucault

PLACES IN CONSUMPTION

Various consumption practices have been investigated within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) from the standpoint of the identity project they are supposed to support. In the full sense of the term, these practices incarnate identity construction when, like tattooing, they involve the transformation of the body and act upon the self (Follett, 2009; Goulding, Follett, Saren, & Maclaran, 2004; Patterson & Schroeder, 2010; Pentina, Spears, & Sager, 2007; Sanders, 1989; Velliquette, Murray, & Evers, 2006). Although tattooing and its socio-cultural meanings are evolving (Sanders, 1989; Velliquette, Murray, & Creyer, 1998), the practice continues to exhibit a series of paradoxes (Taylor, 1997). Tattooing still stands at the boundary

between an "art world" (Becker, 1982) and "lowbrow craft" (Kosut, 2006), identity expression and identity construction (Pentina et al., 2007), permanence and transformation (Patterson & Schroeder, 2010; Velliquette et al., 2006), personalization and fashion (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005), and deviance and mass consumption (Bengtsson, Ostberg, & Kjeldgaard, 2005).

Despite the embodied character of the topic, the place the body occupies in spaces where these transformation are performed remain evanescent. Whereas the issue of identity, even in its most problematic aspects (Patterson & Schroeder, 2010), is central to CCT studies, the role of space and places is overlooked. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide a theoretical framework that articulates two types of places: first, the body as a place, a topia that we cannot practically escape, and at the same time a utopia, that is, imaginary places that are fantasized from the areas of the body that are unknowable directly (such as our back); second, the places (street shops here) where the transformation of the body and the achievement of utopias are undertaken. Following Foucault (1967/2001, 2009) in his reflection about places – real (topia), imaginary (utopia), and "other" (heterotopia) – the paper provides a theoretical framework that shows how the development of street shops, their increased openness and growing feminization alters the way bodies and their utopias are taken care of.

We investigate this phenomenon in the context of a street shop in a French provincial town – Studio 54 – where a group of self-employed tattooists work under a tattoo manager, a trend that underscores the rapid development of this practice in contemporary western societies (DeMello, 2000; Wymann, 2011). Our approach is based on an ethnographic work, that is, the observation of the shop and interviews conducted with its two managers, three male tattooists, and a young female apprentice whom we deliberately chose to make the main informant of this research. Our decision aligns with the evolution of the world of tattooing and its increasing openness. Long seen as "other spaces" in Foucault's (2009) sense, tattoo parlors are gradually supplanted by street shops, which are more normalized and open places. Emerging from their isolated, marginal, closed, and largely male setting, street shops deploy new strategies to capture new segments of customers, especially young people and women, by recruiting freshly trained female tattooists. We show that the entry of women into the tattooing profession changes the way bodies and their utopias are accompanied. In articulating the links between bodies, their utopias and heterotopic places where these are carried out, we contribute not only to the understanding of the meaning that consumers attribute to the transformation of their body (Bengtsson et al., 2005; Goulding et al., 2004; Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson,

2005; Patterson & Schroeder, 2010; Velliquette et al., 2006), but also to the role played by spaces – sites as well as gendered bodies – in our understanding of these phenomena (Martin, Schouten, & McAlexander, 2006).

REAL, OTHER, AND IMAGINARY PLACES

Places are central to consumption. Whether personal, public, or commercial, they are constantly shaped by activities related to them or that they determine. However, despite their importance and omnipresence, places are mainly viewed as backdrop that remains theoretically underdeveloped. Whether they be homes (Epp & Price, 2008, 2010), work places (Tian & Belk, 2005), cultural site (Kozinets, 2001), or "third places" (Karababa & Ger, 2011; Oldenburg, 1999; Thompson & Arsel, 2004), sites are generally considered simply as topias, that is, areas where the activities that research scrutinizes take place. Providing a brief but rich reflection on space, Foucault (1967/2001) has emphasized that, more so than time, life in contemporary spaces is still governed by a certain number of oppositions within the practices and institutions between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. His analysis on the various relationships that exist among the different sites result in two types being singled out: utopias and heterotopias.

From the former – utopias – Foucault takes the main features set out by More (1516/1997): utopias are place that are nowhere (Maclaran & Brown, 2005), sites with no real place (Foucault, 2009), "spaces that are fundamentally and essentially unreal" (Foucault, 1967/2001, p. 1574), but whose purpose is to remedy the deficiencies of the present world (Kozinets, 2001).

While utopias are unreal places, heterotopias are oppositional locations he proposes examining. Defined as real places – places that *do exist* in the society – they are governed by rules that support various human imaginary projects. These include for example libraries as the purpose of accumulating all knowledge; asylums, prisons or nursing homes as ways to manage and correct physical or moral deviance; cinemas and theaters as spaces of creation of and projection into imagination; cemeteries as sites for commemoration and cult of the dead. Modern technopian ideologies (Kozinets, 2008) can also been found within particular projects pertaining to space colonization, be they ships, planes, spacecrafts, space stations, or the Biosphere II project in Arizona, which represents the most ambitious closed

ecological system on earth. With some exception (Maclaran & Brown, 2005), CCT has come up with several examples of such "heterotopias" without explicitly stating so, for example, the Burning Man project (Kozinets, 2002), Napster music file sharing network (Giesler, 2006), flea markets (Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Sherry, 1990) or back-to-nature communities (Belk & Costa, 1998) to name a few. In these various sites for exchanges, traditional rules currently applying to the marketplace are simultaneously "represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault, 1967/2001, p. 1574). Indeed, these places harbor transactions, which though are not based on common economic standards but on the restoration of alternative modes of exchange such as bartering, haggling, gift giving, and/or reviving traditional ways of life. From this perspective, though they delineate special places where deviant (re)presentations of aesthetics and relationships to the society are expressed, tattoo parlors or street shops have been seldom examined as heterotopic places. However, they host artists (tattooists) who struggle to assert a legitimate "art world" (Becker, 1982) as well as they provide people a place where to ink directly into their skin "personal myths" and need for recognition (Velliquette et al., 2006).

THE BODY AS A TOPIA AND A UTOPIA

The question of the body as the cornerstone of identity construction and the self has been largely addressed (Belk, 1988). Patterson and Schroeder (2010) for example have drawn on a series of metaphorical constructions of the skin – a container, a projection surface, and a cover to be modified – to flesh out this "embodied identity within CCT" (p. 263). However, reducing the body to one of its parts (Belk, 1988) offers a limited conceptualization of the body. Whereas previous literature has used the metaphor of the space as a body (e.g., Belk, 1988), little has been said about the metaphor of the body as a space (Mauss, 1934/1979). Differently from Goffman's (1971) concept of "territory of the self," Foucault (2009) has elaborated both on the body as a "topia" – a place from which one cannot escape because it is strictly identical with the space it occupies – and as a utopia. He stresses the fact that utopias are linked to the body (being for example invulnerable, giant, ultra-powerful, and eternal) precisely because utopias are born of the body. More precisely, the body contains inaccessible and fantasized zones that one can only know with the aid of a mirror, for example one's back or the back of one's head, so that the body is also constantly traversed by and

casted into the world. Though they both refer to a negation (utopia is a place that does not exist, and a myth is a story of events that are not real), topias differ here from "personal myths" (Velliquette et al., 1998). To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, the myth involves looking backward while utopia can be conceived as a dream forward (Abensour, 2000). People often try to reconnect with past events when getting a tattoo (Velliquette et al., 1998), but they also conceive their body as projected in another place and "linked to all the world's elsewheres" (Foucault, 2009). For example, tattooing and tribal markings are ways of making the body a fragment of imaginary space that will communicate with the world of the gods or with the world of others, tattooists playing the game of the go-betweens.

Tattoos Parlors as Evolving Heterotopic Spaces

Utopias of the body are generally enacted in special places outside the profane world, which Foucault (2009) defines as heterotopias or "counter-spaces." Tattoo parlors are inherently heterotopic places because they stand out in the social space to host extraordinary activities and people who are in crisis and/or on the margins of the society. Traditionally attended by deviant populations in western societies, tattoo parlors have long attracted individuals who wanted to inscribe in their bodies a demand for existence, identity recognition and rebellion (Le Breton, 2002). In Russia, for example, first tattoo parlors were opened in the 1990s by former prisoners who continued outside what they were previously doing in jails. The fact that tattooing has become commonplace since the 1980s (DeMello, 2000) highlights the homology between the topia of the places and utopias of the bodies that are worked on in these settings. Both are gradually permeated by fashion, accessibility, and democratization. The progression of the "fashion/adornment discourse" (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005) and the "marketization of tattooing" in the media (Bengtsson et al., 2005) now give rise to an increasing demand on the part of young people, and to a growing feminization of the clientele (Westlake, 1987). As a result, street shops flourish and tend to lose the heterotopic character of conventional tattoo parlors. This shift also favors the entry of women into the male professional body. The feminization of tattooing leads to various adaptations women must consent to in order to force their way into these places because to acquire legitimacy, they are subjected to the necessity of "doing" or "undoing gender" (Butler, 1990, 2004; Gherardi, 1995; Martin et al., 2006). In addition, such evolution might also play a role in altering the relationship to the body.

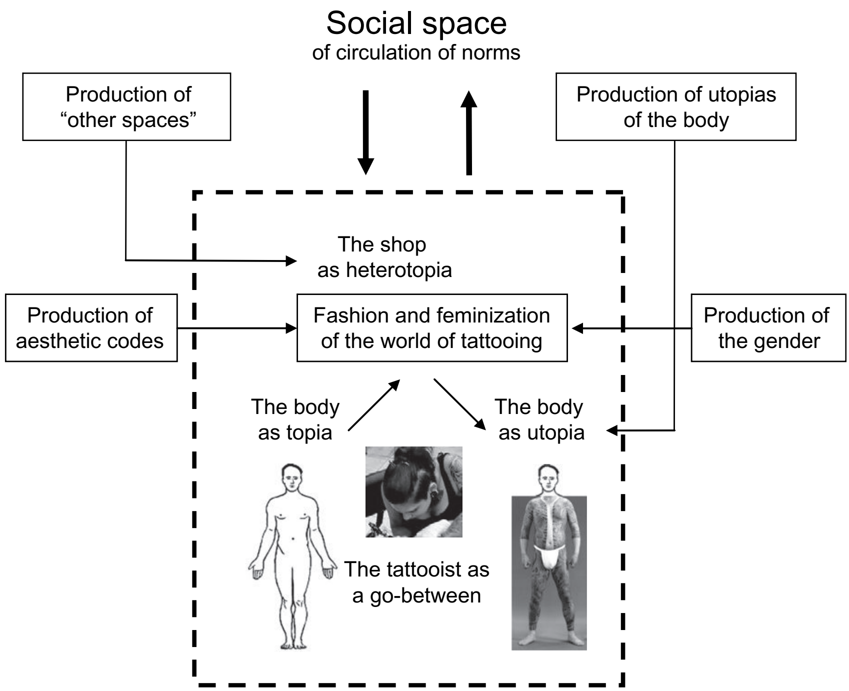

Fig. 1. Spatiality and Symbolic Exchanges in the World of Tattooing.

Our theoretical framework (Fig. 1) proposes an articulation of these different spaces – real, imagined, and "other" – and their relationships with the social space of circulation of norms, those in relation to the body as well as the gender. We examine how these evolutions are enacted in a street shop and how the treatment of the customers' utopias is inflected by female practices (Goulding et al., 2004; Mifflin, 2013). We assume this will enrich our understanding of how various shifts in the world of tattooing reconfigure the relationships between topias, utopias, and heterotopias.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is an ethnography of Studio 54 that has been complemented by a series of interviews with A., a young female apprentice-tattooist aged 21, who has worked here for two years and a non-participatory observation of

her art work in and outside of the shop. A. is also a student at Nantes Art College and is developing her artistic and conceptual thinking through various study projects in relation to the body and perceptions, carried out in the framework of her training. To get a better idea of the context, we also conducted photographic research on various websites and pages created by tattooists on social networks, which helped us to analyze how they present their work, and sometimes the interiors of their shop. Additional interviews were conducted with A.'s tattoo manager and her male tattooist colleagues. Yet, these data have intentionally only been used as an external source of information for the aim of the paper was not to give a panoptic view of the studio as such, but to explore how the personal viewpoint of a young woman apprentice could shed light on the transformations that take place in the world of tattooing. Our data clarify three phenomena: the feminization of the world of tattooing and the way in which women have negotiated their integration into the male world that is training them; the changes in the relationship to the body that precisely stems from their gender; and the relationships between the different forms of spaces – real, imaginary, and other – in which tattooed bodies circulate. The choice of location was made on the basis of privileged access to the Studio 54, whose managers were open to the project and the researcher knew the recently hired apprentice.

Differently from other "insiders" in this domain (e.g., Follett, 2009; Sanders, 1989), the researcher is an "outsider" (Rubin, 1988), not familiar with the world of tattooing or with experience of its practice. It follows from this the advantage of greater decentering with regard to the belief system of informants, but on the other hand runs the risk of misrepresenting their interpretation of the world. Consequently, the conclusions were discussed with the manager and A.'s male colleagues after the analysis (Hogg & Mclaran, 2008; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

The Evolution of Tattoo Shops: Toward a Normalization of "Other Spaces"?

In general, relatively few studies on the subject of tattooing examine the places where the profession is exercised. Yet, their heterotopic dimension is crucial for understanding the fact that the activity was/is physically carried out in socially marginal environments. Historically, tattooing took place in genuine heterotopic and isolated places such as ships or prison, involving specific and often deviant populations. It functioned as a marker of chosen

or incurred integration/exclusion in relation to society and its definition of normality (Foucault, 2003; Le Breton, 2002; Sanders, 1989). With the "tattoo Renaissance" (Rubin, 1988; Velliquette et al., 1998), the commodification (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005) and "Artification" of tattooing (Kosut, 2014), the number of tattoo shops in cities has increased. This presence is manifested in two ways. The first is originally grounded in traditional, predominantly artistic tattoo parlors. These are located in cities but with often reduced visibility and accessibility. Tattoo artists become known through relation channels or by means of conventions they participate in. They attract a clientele that has chosen them because of their reputation (Sanders, 1988). Websites they create on social networks allow them to compensate for their lack of visibility by enabling customers – and/or others tattooists in the profession – to see their work and appraise their graphic talents. Videos of them at work are often added to testify to their skills.

The second and more recent type of presence is that of "street shops" (Wymann, 2011). Responding to a growing enthusiasm for tattooing (DeMello, 2000; Sanders, 1988), they have sprung up in busy, high visibility locations in large cities, which serve to attract a more ordinary and less selective clientele with regard to the artist's reputation. A. sums up the characteristics of a street shop as follows:

> What's different about street shops is that there is a very different clientele. Because street shops are very smart and understand that traditional parlors have a very limited clientele – though this is deliberate – who ask them what they want to do. By contrast, we accept everyone. We inspire trust, even for people who would be put off by traditional stuff.

This commercial positioning also changes the look of the shop, which becomes more open, easy to reach and accessible. This spirit of openness leads street shops to merge more with the aesthetic codes of conventional retailing, as may be seen from Fig. 2.

> A.: The shop window is designed to attract a very wide clientele, it's classy, almost like a jeweler's shop, and you can go in without worrying.
>
> I: If you had to compare street shops to another type of shop, what would it be?
>
> A.: A clothes store

This openness may also be attested through the way the tattooing cubicle is organized. In Studio 54, an open plan area is shared by all the tattooists, without any separating walls, apart from a so-called intimacy area reserved for tattoo work where the customer is naked.

Fig. 2. Frontage and Interior of the Street Shop (Studio 54, Nantes).

Fig. 3. Reception Area and Open Plan Cubicle (Studio 54, Nantes).

In general, traditional tattooists present very few visual illustrations of their shop on the Internet whereas street shops do. In this case, pictures show a clear scenographic separation between the sales area and the tattooing cubicle. In the former, they adopt references to the Gothic, Celtic, Polynesian or "neo-trad" motifs that traditional tattoo artists often draw upon, but often tend to stand closer to the world of luxury by using a red and black or black and gold decor. In the cubicle, on the other hand, a clinical whiteness is called for to emphasize the hygienic character and conformity to health rules that all "serious" tattooists now pride themselves upon (Fig. 3).

Yet even democratized, the tattoo shop still remains an "other space" (Foucault, 1967/2001) for four reasons. First, compared to other service outlets, it makes definitive changes to the body, which affect appearance. A rite of passage or identity claim making the body a text (addressed to oneself and/or the other) (Le Breton, 2002; Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1960), such permanent and definitive change obeys motivations which, like other radical transformations, are often related to an event, a transition, or a critical time

in a person's life (Sanders, 1988; Schouten, 1991). In fact, these shops function, even euphemistically, as "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment within which they live, in a state of crisis" (Foucault, 1967/2001, p. 1575) or, at the very least, in transition (Schouten, 1991). Second, because of its liminal character, the tattoo shop is a place that is neither completely open nor completely closed. Even if the evolution of street shops has made them places easier to get in, one does not enter them by chance. In most cases, a person knows in advance why he/she is going there, and this type of decision departs from the prevailing social norms (DeMello, 2000; Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005; Le Breton, 2002; Sanders, 1988; Wymann, 2011). Third, the tattoo shop also temporarily suspends time in the life of the individual. There is a before and an after the visit to the shop, from which one emerges transformed. And finally, in relation to the outside world, the activities that take place there also have a precise "function," specific to heterotopia. Following Foucault, this function is to create "a space of illusion that that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (Foucault, 1967/2001, p. 1580). Since "all tattoos refer to the experience of transgression" (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005, p. 176), participating in the reappropriation of one's body as personal, unique, transformable, inscribable, and expressive matter (Patterson & Schroeder, 2010) confers a highly heterotopic character on to these places.

The street shop's openness and scenography thus go hand in hand with expectations that intimately affect the person's relations with his/her corporeal identity. Street shops gradually try to adjust to the increasing numbers of new customers, particularly women. Consequently, their appearance is changing as well as their recruitment policy directed at women. But training a young female apprentice calls into question the issue of gender in a traditionally hyper-masculine subculture (Martin et al., 2006). The way by which the female body manages to be integrated into the male professional body of tattooing calls for an investigation of how gendered bodies simultaneously work in relation to the bodies of customers.

From the Opening Up of Places to Gender Mixing: The Entry of the Female Body in the Professional Body of Tattooing

A. says she entered the world of tattooing "more or less by chance." An art student, she was intending simply to sell "flash" tattoo designs and not necessarily trying to join a system she perceived as "highly closed."

> I was going around tattoo shops showing them the designs I've done and saying "I'd like to sell some" and mostly they weren't interested. There was someone who said, "Leave your CV and I'll get back to you," but they didn't call back. Then there was the Studio 54, and they said, "I'll give you an appointment for next Thursday." Direct! So much the better! So, just like that, they gave me an appointment and I came back the following week and I met Alex, the "tattoo manager."

While A. claims she had an interest in tattooing, having previously worked on in art projects, she also acknowledges having been "frightened by the milieu itself."

> In Paris, I'd met these people who I talked to about my projects for art schools and they appeared to me as archetypal tattooists – stupid, boorish and misogynist.

The apparent ease with which A. was asked to take on an apprenticeship contrasts with the historically closed and male nature of this subculture, but illustrates the desire for openness characteristic of the new street shops.

> A: I went back there then because I was what they needed. Because they know that they appeal to a public with lots of 17 and 18 year old girls. And there are lots of girls who prefer to be with a girl. Only a week later, for example, I designed something. They needed someone. I was available. The girl definitely wanted me to design a little something for her, a girl who was only 17 or 18. She was with her mother and asked, "So, it'll be with you?" And Sara – the sales girl – told her "We've got three tattooists" (as if she had forgotten that I was there). I looked at her and said "You're kidding me!?" (because she was right in front of me). She said "Oh, sorry! In fact A. is also an option." And the girl said, "Yeah, I'd really like that! I'd prefer her." And so I have lots of feedback from young girls.

Learning the techniques nevertheless takes place in a male environment (Martin et al., 2006). It requires a capacity on the part of the apprentice to put up with mockery of her clumsiness and still unsure mastery of the know-how, as well as constant references to her gender, her body being constantly reduced to the level of a sexual object.

> A: Well, you see, when you're a girl, you've obviously got to expect jokes *because* you are a girl. So, for example, "she does chick tattoos" and things like that. It's not a very subtle sort of humor, you know. They don't think about it too much … I don't know, maybe to retain a bit of authority or something. For example, the typical thing they'd say to me every time I came into the tattoo cubicle was "Hey! A.! Show your tits to the customer … that'll relax him!" It's little things, funny, it isn't humiliation. But they constantly play on it. The jokes become boring.
>
> I: But it is unambiguously pitched at a level that clearly states what it means, i.e. that you are simply viewed in relation to your gender?

> A: Yes, of course! And for example, there was another thing that was … my ultimate punishment [laughs]. If I made a big mistake, my ultimate punishment, would be sodomy, like …"Careful, you're on the wrong way." And later, it became almost a game. The last time, they were talking about it and I said to them, "I've been expecting that. I didn't even see it coming." It became almost a game. There were some people in the tattoo cubicle who didn't even understand what we were talking about (Laughs).

Within the topic space of the street shop, the coexistence of the genders reproduces the power relations exercised by men, who are the bearer of the knowledge, know-how, and capital associated with the practice of tattooing. Like many professional and consumer contexts that have gradually had to contend with a more equitable mix, tattooing is undergoing a gender shift (Martin et al., 2006). "Undoing Gender" (Butler, 2004) thus consists of untying the normative investment traditionally attached to sex and, in this kind of work situation, reorienting it almost exclusively toward its technical function. This applies not only to A.'s male colleagues but also to customers, where attraction constantly threatens to subvert the work relationship (Fig. 4).

> With young men there is necessarily an element of attraction after a while, but it's the same thing for a male tattooist with a young woman. There's an ambiguous relationship that is created with the nakedness of the body. There are also positions, which necessarily create a sensual ambiguity. I cope with it by not altering my usual attitude. I would not adopt a specially motherly attitude. My thinking is that I'll tattoo them as if I was tattooing myself. That is to say, I put them on a par with me.

Entering the world of tattooing thus requires, for a woman, taking on the element of masculinity that is at the heart of the activity and its symbolism (Martin et al., 2006). Acknowledgment, by her peers, of a successful adaptation is expressed in a funny way through the quips that her male colleagues address to her from time to time.

> A.: before you were a pretty girl. Now you've become a weird guy.

But gender is not only a constraint to be negotiated through the power relations that are exercised in the world of work (Butler, 1990) and by constantly assigning a place to the body, that is to say at a certain distance from the other (Hall, 1959). It is also a way of being that accompanies, with its appropriate sensitivity, the utopias of the customer's body. "Doing gender" (Gherardi, 1995) when working on the other's skin thus involves reproducing certain role expectations, particularly in the gentle touch viewed as characteristic of femininity.

Fig. 4. Altering the Gender Relations Underlying the Operational Technique.

Female Accompaniment to Utopias of the Body

A street shop is organized differently from a traditional tattoo parlor. Whereas the independent tattoo artist is responsible variously for the design and graphic implementation of the tattoo as well as welcoming his clientele (Wymann, 2011), the tattoo manager job created at Studio 54 separates these tasks, enabling the tattooists to concentrate solely on their craft. Thus the tattoo manager greets customers on their arrival and conducts them, depending on the schedule and type of tattoo they want, to a specific tattooist. The way in which A. describes customer management emphasizes the different stages through which the customer is channeled (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Customer Reception Area: Display Cabinet and Design.

> Someone comes into the shop and usually everyone's busy. So the first person who becomes free, the customer heads over to him and says, "Hi, I've come to find out about getting a tattoo." Then there are two possibilities. Either there are tattooists available or at the design table, so they are sent there and in this case there's direct contact with the customer beforehand. Or nobody's free and Alex takes care of the person. He's able to tell him the price, except when very large tattoos are involved, or very specific stuff, when he'll see the tattooist in the cubicle and ask him. For example, he'll come and see me and ask if I'm interested. We'll discuss the price and he'll go back and see the client to give him or her some information.

Most of the time, the customer has a design in mind and the tattooist works from this and interprets what the customer wants.

> We need the person to give us a more or less well-defined design, because there are people who say, "I want a butterfly this size" and in fact their butterfly will have millions of small patterns in it, whereas we were thinking of a quite simple butterfly. There are so many graphic worlds that the only way to communicate is with images.

While authors tend to classify customers according to whether they are already tattooed or are intending to have one (Vale, 1999) and on the extent of their involvement in the practice (Goulding et al., 2004; Patterson & Schroeder, 2010), A. tends to categorize them more in terms of their style. A hierarchy of tastes is established around expert versus profane knowledge, giving rise to a cultural and aesthetic distinction (Bourdieu, 1984).

> Tribal stuff, that'll definitely be people who tune their cars. Or conversely, they'll be pseudo beautiful body-building kids because they've seen guys on TV with tribal or Maori tattoos. And then there's stuff for girls, you know they'll often be girls who are leaving high school, real neat on them, who've seen it's pretty, and suits them fine … I had a guy who asked me for a Ferrari horse, the Ferrari logo. It really speaks to the guy, he's a car nut, a technician, and his dream is to became an F1 racing driver. The design he chose really says it all about the guy. Pretty much all the time, I know who

I'm going to be dealing with. Everyone who chooses the same design will have the same aesthetic tastes, including how they dress, how they look. In the art I work on, there are aesthetic categories, and as a result there are obviously some people who fit in with mine and those who don't.

People's tastes, moreover, lead to street shop tattooists making more compromises than independent artists would agree to. Whereas the former can hardly refuse a customer who comes to them, the latter turn down requests that do not fit in with their preferred graphic world. Nevertheless, A. expresses her discomfort when she is asked to respond to certain requirements, particularly tribal tattoos, arguing that she does not feel appropriate to answer expectations involving cultural meanings she does not truly know.

The thing is, I'm not Polynesian, I don't live in the Marquesas Islands, and the designs are really complex. I don't know this art. And unfortunately you do Maori tattoos because that's the fashion, but Maori tattooing means something and it's highly coded and I don't have the keys to do this stuff. Tattooing means something too! That's why I don't understand people who do knots, because that doesn't mean anything. Tattoos really have a meaning, even if it's personal … or else not, because for the Maoris it's not personal, since they start from the principle that the body is a cosmos and that everything is connected. For the Maoris, tattoos are your identity card. It's like sailors when they had tattoos, an anchor, that meant you done so many miles aboard ship. Tattoos are an expression of your life. But we can't do that, we don't know.

Going along with what the customer wants involves, in A.'s view, immersing oneself in the utopias of the other person's body (Foucault, 2009), becoming familiar with their cultural and symbolic aspirations and, up to a point, sharing them. In this respect, she feels different from her male colleagues, whom she thinks are less empathetic toward and more unconcerned about what they are asked to do.

Would you think of writing in hieroglyphics to a friend without knowing what they mean? N., for example, he doesn't care, you ask him to do it, he does it, whether it's there on the Internet or not, it's all the same to him. But me, I can't. It's something that's really freighted with meaning.

Similarly, understanding the meaning of a tattoo implies to decode what it represents for a customer according to the design and the place where it is "inked," thus sharing a mutual conception of his/her project.

There are places on your body that you are aware of but cannot see, your back or your face, and as a result you fantasize about, you imagine, and you only know indirectly, that is, in a mirror. They are areas you can never directly explore yourself and that you visualize through sensations and with your memory. On the upper back, that's something you carry like a burden. It may also be a dagger in the back, something you can't

> see, but that you'll have on it forever, like an April fool's joke, everyone can see it except you. Wings, they can also represent hidden lies. People often ask for them on the shoulder blade because they say, "I don't want become tired of the design, so I don't particularly want to see it." And it's weird, they're very much into a utopia of the body, because people don't see it, so they fantasize about their tattoo throughout their life without really seeing it. They don't get bored with it because they'll simply imagine it.

More specifically, responding in an intimate way to what some female customers want, especially very one young ones, results, for A., in a particular type of relationship. This is expressed through the management of emotions surrounding the whole process and, during the tattooing itself, by using an appropriate body language.

> There was this girl who'd just turned 18 and who came to get a tattoo of a butterfly with a ribbon, a symbol of flight and rebirth. And she said to me, "I want this butterfly because my life's been shit, for the last three years a lot of bad thighs has happened and I'm having this tattoo as a renewal and because it represents the end of this disjointed life so that a new life begins." And I thought it was really nice that she said that. It was like she was transferring to me the intention she wanted to be realized. She arrived with a sketch drawn by a friend. And once we'd got going, she knew from my movements that I'd have it in my head, at least being a silly bitch who didn't give a damn about it. And at the end, I said to her, "I hope this tattoo brings you luck." And it was as if in what I said there was also something imposing order … not a shaman, but the fact of saying it, it was as if there was a gri-gri. I had the impression at that moment of being inside a bubble, with the others outside around me. We'd enacted a ceremony around something to ward off misfortune.

The relation to the body of the other thus needs to be managed differently according to the person's gender. Kept at a distance with men, the body acquires a central position with young women, and is a matter of helping them in their intimate, initiatory journey.

> When I see these young girls, I behave kind of maternally. I ask in a quiet voice if it's going okay. What's more, it was on her back, on her neck. What I like very much about that area is that it's an area of trust because you'd don't see what the other person is doing. You've got to be trusting because the person could be doing anything to you. You don't know if she's screwing it up, you don't see anything. You can even look and see how much pain she's suffering. For example, I like to look and see if it's causing pain. Here you're completely blind. Like they say, blind trust. When I'm behind, I often have a support role, I help much more by talking to them because they can't see me, I keep them abreast of what's going on, for example, "I'm going to start now. Okay?," "I'm going to draw a little line, you tell me if it's okay." She answers, and I say, "See, it's nothing much." I talk so that the person feels trust, and to relax her. "And there, we're coming to the end now, we're nearly done." I say there's just one little line to do. You see, all the time I guide what's happening.

Thus, in certain situations, the tattooing action evolves. Not so rough, gentler, more feminine, it constitutes another way of handling the body, despite the piercing of the skin, an inescapable part of tattooing. In trying to sooth the body as much as possible, A. introduces a fairly substantial shift in the symbolic of the pain that seals the masculine nature of the practice.

> I pay a lot of attention to helping young girls feel okay and I let them know this by saying, "Hey, this is the easy bit, from here on in it's going to be tough." I've a number of stock phrases I use. Like, "This is going to hurt, but you'll feel great afterwards." And in fact, that helps enormously with the stage that follows. Basically, you clean up, you wipe off the surplus ink, blood and lymph, you dispose of it … it's a bit like you've been crying. You wipe the stuff off, you get rid off what makes it all messy and dirty, you've been through a battle. And you return to something aesthetic, clean, beautiful. Then you take the ointment, and you massage the area, put a layer on, like when there are open wounds you put on mud. Shamans do that, that's what it makes me think of, it's to seal it off in fact. But hey, some tattooists slap on the ointment, and that's it.

Pain is an integral part of tattooing, a major aspect of the rite of passage, if only for its cathartic value (Le Breton, 2002; van Gennep, 1960). When getting tattooed herself, A. says she "likes the pain," which "makes her feel the body exists," but she is also aware that the customer's comfort depends on his/her own tolerance. Thus she feels that an overly male management of pain follows stereotyped patterns, that, in contrast to other tattooists, it's useful to break with (Gherardi, 1995).

> There's one guy with a muscular build and he makes a big thing of it and that causes discomfort. Sometimes he says to the guy, "You're gonna be a real man!" and so he ups the pressure. I think he might understand that's not the best way. It's even the kind of thing that suddenly triggers vagal discomfort. Discomfort, it's purely emotional, it's physical, but it's triggered by the brain. You trigger discomfort. By being gentle, things often go better.

The inclusion of women in the world of tattooing shifts the symbolic relationship that customers have with the practice. It is not necessarily a matter of no longer wanting to suffer any pain, though feelings along such lines may sometimes be expressed, but of producing a smooth transformation in which female body movements are deployed to make it less alarming and ease some of its violence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Long dominated by men, the world of tattooing is beginning to come to terms with a clientele that is changing with regard to its socio-cultural

characteristics and motivations (Martin et al., 2006). The utopias of the body, which oscillate between self-construction and the embellishment of appearance (Bengtsson et al., 2005; Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005; Patterson & Schroeder, 2010; Pentina et al., 2007; Sanders, 1989), pass through a physical place amidst other bodies whose movements and gender impact the customer's experience.

By producing definitions of normality in terms of being a body, the social space has created "counter-spaces" in which different and often deviant forms of individual existence have found room to express themselves. Tattoo shops are an example of these "other spaces" housing utopias of a transformed, appropriated, transfigured body that is reinvested in the biographical trajectory of the subject, including through its painful, indelible, and radical modification (Le Breton, 2002).

Symbolic exchanges operate between the dominant social space and these heterotopias, the ongoing transformation of which is noted by Foucault (1967/2001). The broader context in which fashion and media participate in increasing the visibility and democratization of tattooing seems to constitute the explanatory background for the integration of women into street shops and commercial response to these developments (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). In turn, the topia of the shops is transformed in a similar manner: the gender mix and the way the operational area is organized reflect the openness and feminization of the approach. Focusing on places as the location where these practices occur enriches the understanding of the symbolic exchanges that "take place" and "make place" in relation to body identity projects.

The proposed theoretical framework helps to anchor thinking about consumption practices within a spatial domain that organizes these symbolic exchanges. Focusing on places nevertheless only touches upon Foucault (1967/2001) recommendation to erect a genuine heterotopology. Further research in CCT could thus undertake additional descriptions and analysis of these "other spaces" that are a kind of challenge, at once mythical and real, to the space in which we live.

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SITUATING MEN WITHIN LOCAL TERRAIN: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

Dee Duffy

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *To explore how young men operating within influential discursive regimes construct their identity projects and come to know themselves through their engagement with consumption and leisure practices.*

Methodology/approach – *Foucauldian theory is drawn upon to conceptualise men as intertwined within their social environs, the recipients of socio-cultural inscription. By situating the micro-social context of the male consumer in a larger socio-cultural context, this study endeavours to go beyond consumer narratives to incorporate the influence of market and social systems on individuals' identity work.*

Findings – *This study shows how identity projects are subject to the workings of power coursing through social networks. Individuals prescribing to a particular identity become subjected to the regulatory mechanisms of their community. However it is shown how subjectification*

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operates differently in the highly structured community of sport compared to the less structured community of a hometown dwelling.

Social implications – *This sociological perspective on men's identity practices highlights the dynamic power forces penetrating social communities, in turn showing the necessity for consumer researchers to anchor the individual consumer experience within their influential environment to gain a more robust understanding of consumer behaviours and consumption practices.*

Originality/value of paper – *This paper explores the individual's constructions of identity as situated within historically and locally particular cultural practices. This approach allows a better understanding of how consumers negotiate the world around them, keeping in mind the socio-cultural forces that serve to constrain and enable their activity, both in their daily lives and in the marketplace.*

Keywords: Identity projects; consumption practices; Foucauldian theory; power relations; social communities

Consumer culture theory (CCT) has recently been critiqued for assigning excessive attention to the individual's personal experience in order to gain insights into marketplace activity (Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009), and for placing too much emphasis on the consumer as an agent who can readily draw upon market-based resources to construct his or her own identity (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Instead, there is a call for consumer researchers to locate consumer consumption stories within a broader narrative context of established cultural meanings (Thompson, 1997). This paper aims to address these criticisms. It explores the individual's constructions of identity as situated within historically and locally particular cultural practices. This approach allows a better understanding of how consumers negotiate the world around them, keeping in mind the socio-cultural forces that serve to constrain and enable their activity, both in their daily lives and in the marketplace. Thompson, Pollio, and Locander (1994) outline numerous cultural influences that impact consumer behaviour, including social settings, cultural ideals and gender roles. This shift away from individualistic conceptualisations of subjectivity, agency and marketplace activity, towards incorporating particular situational and contextual limits and conditions of social action, allows for the consideration of power relations operating

throughout social structures, in turn shaping the subjectivity of individuals in different contexts (Moisander et al., 2009, p. 337). To this end, engaging Foucauldian theory allowed me to conceptualise men as intertwined within their social environs, the recipients of socio-cultural inscription. Through consideration of the body as produced through discourse as well as disciplinary practices, Foucauldian theory facilitates exploration of the effects of power (to include the influence of peers, family, community, mass media and social institutions) on the individual. The subject remains discursively and socially conditioned in power relations, yet within this configuration the individual's agency to 'define their own identity, to master their body and desires, and to forge a practice of freedom through techniques of the self' (Best & Kellner, 1991) is upheld.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

In recent years the Irish media have reproduced numerous reports and statistics on the rising social and mental health issues affecting young men in Ireland. A prominent voice on this issue, journalist John Waters, has repeatedly suggested that it is Irish society and societal systems that are culpable for young men's 'individual feelings of despair, isolation and meaninglessness' (Waters, 2012). Elsewhere it is reported Irish men are reluctant to communicate personal problems for fear of appearing unmanly (Kiernan, 2009). It was within this climate of rising concern for young Irish men that I recognised the need to explore further how young men construct their identity projects. And furthermore how wider social and cultural forces influence these constructions of identity. Consequently, in order to identify the social constraints and cultural continuities working upon individual men, I situate my respondents within the social and cultural context (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011) of their influential discursive regimes. Following the understanding that power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus (Foucault, 1982), I chose specific practices through which to explore men's identity constructs. Each discursive practice serves to locate the subject in his own community of practices, and then to offer a spectrum of possible comparisons, contrasts and overlaps to illustrate the networks of power that weave through systems of social arrangements. By exploring how such discursive regimes order individuals' lives, this study shows how the individual subject is intertwined, and constrained, within these societal power networks.

With regard to selecting particular discursive practices to explore, this in the end came down to my own rationale as a researcher, and as an Irish citizen with a consciousness of influential communities within Irish culture. As Askegaard and Linnet point out, ultimately the researcher is presented with an infinite range of contexts that could be explored and so an analytical choice eventually has to be made to 'cordon off a part of the analytical field and present it as a contextual domain' (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p. 396). And so I propose my analytical reasoning for choosing two particular discursive contexts to discuss in this paper: hometown community and national sport.

The first context is that of one's hometown community, or what (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) term a 'community of practices'. Traditionally twentieth-century Ireland was regarded as nurturing caring communities bound together by a high degree of social consensus (Ferriter, 2004). However, this positing of the Irish family as sacrosanct within communities is proposed as a mythical conception, with recent scholarship recording changes in family life being driven by economic desire rather than any social or moral responsibility (Kennedy, 2001). It has been suggested that young men in particular have been affected by the demise of the traditional family unit, and the rapidly changing social structures and values in Ireland (Richardson, 2009). It is proposed that such influences impact upon Irish men's constructions of gender (Ferguson, 1998; Ferguson & Reynolds, 2001; Magennis & Mullen, 2011). In this social climate of change, it is suggested that modes of masculinity must also be in flux, in order to adapt to these changes (Magennis & Mullen, 2011). And so, stemming from this ongoing discussion of Irish society in transition, the once traditional location of one's hometown community and familial roots was selected as an interesting context wherein to explore cultural influences upon men's constructions of identity.

The second discursive practice selected is one of Ireland's national sports – Gaelic football. This emerged as a logical context in which to consider Irish masculinity. In his essay on sport and the body, Hargreaves (1987) explains how emphasis on the sporting body is less about the cultivation of proper values and gait, and more concerned with the regulatory production of identity. Sport in Ireland has long been a centrally important vehicle for the transmission of ideology and identity (Cronin, 1999). From its inception, the Gaelic Athletic Association[1] (GAA) has strategically aligned Irish masculinity with national identity, with the 'GAA man' epitomising the strong, skilful and moral Irishman (Cronin, 2007). The major influence of this sporting organisation within Irish sporting and cultural life, with clubs

spread throughout most parishes in the country, made it an attractive field of analysis for this study.

Through consideration of the individual as situated and interconnected within their immediate, influential discursive regimes and practices, this study adds to the structure versus agency debate that pervades consumer culture literature. By exploring the various workings of power to which the individual is subjected in his daily life practices, this paper intends to challenge conceptualisations of the 'free' consumer or, conversely, the 'dominated' consumer. Instead this work responds to Murray's call for consumer studies to explore further the 'dialectic interplay between agency and structure' (2002). By exploring the power relations that weave through the mundane practices of individuals' everyday lives, this study aims to show this interchange at work, and thus how identity work is actually carried out in practice. In particular, rather than avoid the complexities and uncertainties that practice-based approaches to research can unfold, this work will seek to explore ambivalences that exist within contexts (Brownlie & Hewer, 2011).

RESEARCH APPROACH

This paper draws primarily from data collected following in-depth qualitative interviews. In addition, to gain a better understanding of the discursive regime of Gaelic sport, further data was gathered through participant observation at Gaelic football matches, reviewing online Gaelic sport websites, newspaper articles and blogs, close reading of Gaelic sport advertising material, and researching history books recording the history and social significance of Gaelic Sport in Ireland. A constructionist approach is followed to analyse the interview data with the understanding that a consumer's narrated experience is embedded in a social web of possible interpretation. Rather than seeking to discover a respondents 'essential self' within interview data, this research takes a narrative analysis approach, considering individuals storytelling within the context of circulating discourses and power relations. Taking this approach allows us to consider identity projects as 'enmeshed in – and produced within – webs of social relations' (Lawler, 2008).

Holstein and Gubrium, in their constructionist approach to analysing interview data – what they term 'the active interview' – are concerned with how people construct their meaning in interviews. It is said that their

interest lies in the assembly of this meaning along with what gets assembled; that is, they analyse what interviewees are saying as well as how they say it (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). These authors explain further how 'the active interview' is 'not merely to describe the situated production of talk, but to show how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 127). Adhering to the constructionist approach, this researcher proposes to concentrate on the local or situated character of interview-talk when analysing her data, while also, where appropriate, questioning the cultural resources from which interviewees may draw to do their 'local' work (Silverman, 2006, p. 145).

Transforming a lived experience into language and constructing a story about it is not a straightforward process, but rather such narrative composition is delivered to its audience in a particular moment in history, and draws upon 'taken-for-granted discourses and values circulating in a particular culture' (Riessman Kohler, 2008). Perhaps symptomatic of contemporary preoccupation with postmodern transient identities, the popularity of adopting narrative analysis practice in social research has expanded as it offers interesting stories of individuals constructing 'who they are and how they want to be known' (Riessman Kohler, 2008, p. 7). Certainly within postmodern marketing thought there has been a shift in recent years from understanding people as meaning-giving subjects to locating meaning in the social practices and literary texts that individuals produce (Moisander et al., 2009, p. 337).

Narrative analysis focuses attention on sequences of action; that is, the researcher focuses on 'particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times' (Abbott cited in Riessman Kohler, 2008, p. 11). The interview data does not merely reflect people's subjective experience, but rather is considered 'social texts'; that is, 'complex cultural, social and psychological products, which construct a particular version of those experiences' (Moisander et al., 2009, p. 337).

Foucault maintains that we are 'subjected to the production of truth through power' (1980, p. 93). As such, he is not concerned with explaining how true sentences relate to the world. Instead Foucault concerns himself with 'how power produces discourses of truth through "a complex enabling and limiting of discursive actions," that is, by determining "what may and may not be uttered"' (DeAngelis, 2008, p. 121). Likewise, Riessman Kohler purports that narrative analysis is not about trying to determine whether the interviewee is telling the exact 'truth' of the event or story they tell; what is more interesting is the analyst's interpretive work with the document. In particular, exploring 'stories that fail the test and diverge from

established "truth" can sometimes be the most interesting, indicating silenced voices and subjugated knowledge' (2008, p. 186).

While there are a number of ways in which one can analyse a narrative text, to include thematic analysis and structural analysis, the method most appropriate to this study is dialogical or performance analysis. Dialogical analysis is interested in how social reality is constructed through interaction, whereby what we take in everyday culture to be 'true' is actually produced in daily exchanges. Of particular interest to this study is the manner in which this analysis 'can uncover the insidious ways structures of inequality and power … work their way into what appears to be "simply" talk about a life' (Riessman Kohler, 2008, p. 115). The close narrative analysis of even a single case can display 'how larger social structures insinuate their way into individual consciousness and identity, and how these socially constructed "selves" are then performed for (and with) an audience' (Riessman Kohler, 2008, p. 116). This analysis aptly lends itself to the Foucauldian theoretical framework followed in this research study.

Before presenting the research findings, what follows is a short profile of the two groups and the respondents discussed in this particular paper.

The Townland Lads (hometown community): The Townland Lads are a group of five male respondents aged between 28 and 30 years. All respondents have been friends since secondary-level school and grew up together in a provincial town in the midlands region of Ireland. In the interest of discretion, this town will be assigned the pseudonym 'Mooretown'. The two respondents discussed in this paper are Donal and John.

Donal: at 29 years of age Donal is married, with his wife expecting their first child. He is an electrician by trade, although for the past few years he pursued a career in music. He is a member of a relatively successful Irish music band and so has been the focus of much media attention. Donal admits to being uneasy with the lifestyle etched out for him by his management company and would much rather be at home in Mooretown with the lads than up in Dublin at public events. At the time of this interview he reveals that the band plans on announcing that they will take a break from the music scene. Donal welcomes this sabbatical and plans to drum up local business again as an electrician in the town.

John: is a 30-year-old sales representative for a well-known coffee brand in Ireland. He lived in Dublin during his early twenties while at college, and also lived in Australia for a year. He returned home to live in Mooretown in his mid-twenties, and although he often considered moving back to Australia, instead he met a local girl, they built a house on his

parents' land in the countryside, and recently they celebrated their marriage in their hometown. As yet they have no children. He reflects that the life he has built for himself is the antithesis of what he envisioned for himself at the age of 21. His ambitions for BMW cars and living a 'yuppie lifestyle' subsided and instead he chooses to 'work to live rather than live to work'. He reluctantly admits that he conforms to conventional grooming and styling practices; however, he does offer his 'funny-coloured runners' as a flicker of rebellion against his otherwise conformist style.

The GAA Fellas: This group comprises five interviewees between 22 and 27 years of age, all hailing from North County Dublin. For the purpose of this paper just one respondent is discussed. Peter would be well known to GAA followers as he is in the Dublin squad.

Peter: On the cusp of his 21st birthday, Peter arrived at the penultimate rung on every aspiring young Gaelic player's ladder – a place on the County Senior Football team. Twenty-three years of age at the time of interview, he has a number of Gaelic achievements under his belt. Peter served his apprenticeship as a plumber before being awarded a scholarship to study at a nearby university. Much of Peter's life to date has been shaped and guided by the GAA, with his daily routine centring on football training, competitions and matches. While he may have had to forfeit nightlife socialising to be fit for a Sunday morning match, he sees this as a small sacrifice to make in comparison to the euphoria of collecting a Leinster title trophy in front of 80,000 GAA supporters in Croke Park – headquarters of the GAA.

FINDINGS: THE TOWNLAND LADS

The Townland Lads displayed a distinct consciousness of their selves, and how their selves could be acted out within the confines of their hometown community. There appeared to be unwritten rules of acceptability as to how one behaved and dressed 'down the town' (Donal). In particular, one respondent, Donal, a relatively high-profile music band member, struggled greatly with his 'mediated self'; that is, the persona he was required to adopt for stage life, and his 'home self' – Donal the electrician and lad around town. Within his hometown, he rigorously policed himself to ensure he was not seen to be 'stepping up above the crowd' (Donal). According to Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', Western society is not being ruled by any sovereign or juridical stronghold *per se* but instead is subjected to

an internal policing of its own social body. Throughout the interview with Donal he articulates this concept poignantly when struggling to find a public mediated image that he could realistically embrace in his own personal domain; that is, his hometown.

Donal strives to establish a cohesive identity for himself between his mediated life and his habitual life. While he expresses a clear understanding as to why the band's record label requires them to project a smart, fashionable image for promotional purposes, his resistance to overstepping 'his' comfort zone is resolute. His gauge of what is fashionably acceptable continuously returns to what 'the town' is prepared to accept. An anonymous entity – what I have called the 'Village Voice' – appears to restrict Donal's creativity to express his self in any 'outlandish' fashion.

> Donal: … I suppose it's a matter of getting comfortable with what you're at, but at the time I wasn't, and ya wouldn't have worn that in a pub, or into town … and if you did, you, you, you were trying to, you were stepping up above the crowd y'know. You were kind of, do you know what I mean, in the sense that, the Mooretown fashion, or whatever people were wearing, like if I wore something outlandish, I was trying to go in and say … I, I was thinking this is what people were thinking, 'Here's your man, just because he's the drummer in The Band he thinks he can wear this or that'.

Likewise, John a 30-year-old sales representative alludes to this governing 'Village Voice' as he recalls a rare act of rebellious consumption on his part when away from the panoptic gaze of his hometown of Mooretown on a sun holiday. John laments his late teens as he describes it as a bygone era when he was true to himself. He wore his hair long, wore 'combats and the baggy knitted jumpers and the baggy t-shirts with like Nirvana and different bands written on it' and was into his music – he literally wore his passion (music) on his chest. And so he describes his rebellion:

> John: Again I suppose the biggest kind of contradiction, I kind of, I was drunk on holidays once and I kind of had a flashback to the person I wanted to be, like, I was on holidays with a friend and we got drunk and we were going on our way back to the airport and I got my eyebrow pierced and I kind of, that was maybe me kind of rebelling.

On returning home, John was met with various locals voicing their opinion of his eye-ring:

> John: but like everybody just laughed at me because I had my nice short back and sides (i.e. *conventional haircut*) but I had an eyebrow pierced …. And kind of, it just, everybody kind of said, 'Fair enough, yeah, it's not bad but it's just not you, the person we know you as you are, it's just not you'.

The final straw came when John's minor act of individualisation risked him being banned from a family wedding. When asked how long he kept the piercing:

> John: Around three weeks 'cos my brother was getting married and again, he'd be a very conformative [*sic*] kind of person and he said, 'There's no way you're going to my wedding with an eyebrow ring'.

And so, the 'Village Voice' is indicative of the omnipresent power Foucault conceptualises in his later discussions of power and resistance. It is this ubiquitous power he identifies that can be envisioned metaphorically as being interwoven through societal patterns. There is the temptation at this point to suggest that the Village Voice is a disciplinary technology of the body, being done unto Donal and John, both unsuspecting agents of their own subjection. However to do this would be to dismiss entirely the respondent's individual agency and ability to resist societal forces. Donal is neither trying to shed himself of the shackles of a suffocating society nor trying to liberate himself from the pressures of a commercial lifestyle. Rather his search ultimately is in finding a harmonious way to exist, unifying his life themes in an effort to avoid a schizophrenic existence but instead create coherency in his life. Thus in accordance with Foucault's later articulation of power, there is the knowledge that resistance exists in tandem with power, thereby eliminating lofty assertions of oppression or emancipation.

Nonetheless, John makes reference numerous times to 'having to conform', which does depict, in a similar vein to findings by Shankar, Elliott, and Fitchett (2009), an aura of his being restricted by his immediate community; in particular he pinpoints his 'career' as a sales representative, and the 'kind of company' he has kept (here John was referring to his hometown friends) as having 'led me down to being clean-cut and kind of looking a certain way'. The agency here is John's reluctant admission that he himself made these lifestyle choices regarding work and friends. However, cloaked within his reluctance lies the decision-processing mechanism powered by a 'legacy of socio-historical influences' (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995), or what Shankar et al. (2009) coined as 'narratives of socialisation' whereby John followed prescribed ways of being, almost unconsciously.

So, in a Foucauldian sense, the 'Village Voice' dictating the realms of acceptability for Donal and John can be considered a 'truth', in the sense of that which is made true through discourses. Both young men have constructed a large part of their identity on the basis of being a Mooretown Man and thus, to comfortably align themselves with this geographic

association, they need to adhere to the boundaries or 'truths' set by the 'Village Voice' of their hometown. The power being exercised here by the 'Village Voice' and its 'truths' is in a sense categorising how a Mooretown Man can behave, which in turn creates a template from which each man can deviate from at his peril.

Here it is seen that while these men 'chose' to attach themselves to specific identities, paradoxically as suggested by Lawler (2008) they have become *subjected* to the rules and norms engendered by a set of knowledges about these identities. This discursive regime, the 'Village Voice', can be seen in a sense to be running these young men's lives, almost without regard of their own role or existence. It is this incapacity to challenge cultural 'truths' or discourses of which Foucault urges individuals to be wary.

FINDINGS: THE GAA FELLAS

Peter's stories are littered with anecdotes and examples of the sacrifices he made by pledging commitment to his GAA training regime. He lists various things that he misses out on, such as music festivals and summer holidays (as the GAA football championship runs throughout the summer) or events where he must abstain from a few drinks when everyone around him is indulging, such as his birthday, which falls in summer, his sister's wedding, concerts and weekends in general.

> Peter: just all them kind of concerts and things which I would love to go, but now I don't even think about them, it's not as if – I don't even get excited about them or anything like that' cos there's no point' cos I know I'm not going to be able to go to them.

Additionally the level of physical training and dieting that Peter must subject his body to in order to construct his body to a standard worthy of inter-county level performance is intense. He reveals a training programme that officially should span January to October, but actually requires the player train year-round. This is despite the GAA having a rule banning coaches from training their county teams in November and December. Peter says that no county observes this rule, and instead they create a 'loophole', devising individual weight training plans for each player and providing them with gym membership courtesy of the GAA. So, technically the rule is being observed in that the players are not training as a team. However, the onus is on the individual player to adhere to this weights regime and have his body in good shape for official training resuming in January.

Peter: What would I be doing? I'd be doing all sorts of weights, like upper-body weights, lower-body weights like trying to build your arms, your chest and your back and then you know kind of squats for your thighs and your hamstrings and just to get your legs, like, as strong and as powerful as possible for the season, like, you know?

Interviewer: And what about diets?

Peter: Diets, yeah, well, in training like that, you'd have, like a high-protein kind of diet, like with maybe some protein shake as well, a supplement like, you know, to repair your muscles after doing weights and yeah, like, we would be told what to eat like you know, well no, we would be given guidelines what to eat like, but like … at this time of the year [Championship Season], like, you definitely wouldn't be eating anything like that, any kind of bad stuff like you know, you really couldn't.

In conjunction with the normalising gaze of coaches and other GAA officials, a self-surveillance is in operation. This requires the athlete to take personal responsibility for their actions, and 'in the process of learning the discourse, establish mutual support based on self-reflexivity of what is acceptable and not acceptable' (Johns & Johns, 2000). The sporting practices become normalised in the player's psyche and thus become 'truth'. Peter perfectly captures this integration of the normalising gaze with the internalisation of that made true through discourse:

Interviewer: And even like, when you're having those drinks, do you kind of think, 'Are people wondering should I even be drinking?'

Peter: No, I would never care about that you know, I really wouldn't because like, like, fuck them really to be honest with you, like you know, because I'll have a few drinks if I want, they don't know how many I'm having or anything like that so they can't say anything, but I'd feel guilty after drinking more than anything else, you know, I'd be like, 'I can't with a game on, I really can't' 'cos it's just – and like, even if it doesn't affect you, it mightn't affect you, you know, some people it does, some people it doesn't, but in the week of the game … I don't think having 10 bottles would affect me in the week before a game 'cos I'd be all right but it would be in your head, you'd be like, 'Jesus, maybe I shouldn't have had them' and if you have any doubts like that, like, they can creep in in a game, you know, 'cos you might say, if things aren't going well, you might say, 'Oh Jeez, I shouldn't have had them drinks' like you know that kind of way, 'cos then you might think that was the reason why you're not playing well which is probably bullshit but that's what happens in games you know.

Johns and Johns point out how an athlete's process of continual reflection and monitoring leads him to engage in a practice of self-confession (Johns & Johns, 2000, p. 228). Clearly Peter's narrative 'in his head' and his self-guilt for engaging in 'unacceptable' behaviour reflect a scene akin to a confessional.

Following on from this act of self-care, Peter continues to exhibit such techniques, producing an ethical self. He goes on to describe how he

recently went out for dinner in a local pub. On approaching the bar he was confronted by a local whom he vaguely knew who proceeded to ridicule the recent performance of the Dublin team. Peter tells how he would have loved to reciprocate the comment with his own expletives; instead however he dismissed the guy with an idle sigh and a shrug. When probed on this act of restraint, he recites techniques he has learnt from the GAA panel:

> Dee: But see, the way you say you can't lose your temper with them, why not?
>
> Peter: Well like, it's not, if I lose my temper with them it's just going to make a scene and it's just not – I just kind of nod my head and just kind of get on with it, like, you know? … I suppose you have to keep discipline but you can't like, you just have to kind of be able to just soak it all in, because like, or just have a kind of force field around you and not listen to any of it, and just listen to whatever's going on within the panel, like, you know. That's the only time I'd really, any time when we're with the panel and we're talking about football or stuff like that, that's the only thing that really matters, about what they'll say, you know, because people are all going to have their opinions. Who really cares about their opinions at the end of the day, like, you know, like they'll …
>
> Dee: Like, did you just learn to handle it that way so that people …?
>
> Peter: No, we'd be told to, like we'd have like, we'd have an idea of say a boundary area kind of where we'd have – anything that's inside the boundary area is what we talk about in training and then anything outside the boundary area just kind of hits off us, we just don't even take any of it on board even if it is positive.

The GAA panel, including coaches, mentors and management, have provided Peter with tools that he can draw upon to manage himself in an ethical manner, thus avoiding any 'scene' at the bar as may have been his immediate reaction. Certainly technologies of domination are prominent in the above extract, as Peter describes how the 'boundary area' within which he operates (which the GAA devised) will only allow the GAA voice to penetrate. However, as Hargreaves (1987) points out, it is the individual that recognises the necessity of their own discipline who freely submits to governing techniques. Foucault uses the term 'automatic docility' for this dynamic, whereby governing norms become one's own (Cole, Giardina, & Andrews, 2004).

We can see how technologies of the self come into play in the ethical manner in which Peter behaves himself. Foucault maintains ethical work to be 'the manner in which one ought to conduct oneself' (Foucault, 1984). Peter admits that his initial reaction is to wish to retaliate against this heckler; however, his psyche has been infiltrated by ideal GAA player etiquette, and how an inter-county player ought to behave with the public. He has been programmed by the GAA to imagine a 'force field' to protect him

from exterior interference, a technique he draws upon in this instance. Such acts of 'self-awareness' or 'self-reflection' Foucault conceptualises as the process of 'self-formation as an ethical subject' (Foucault, 1984, p. 29). Markula and Pringle (2006) state that this process of self-formation requires an individual to initially problematise or critically reflect on the code of conduct and then decipher how best to conduct oneself in response to this code. Peter transformed himself, and his base instincts, to produce himself as an ethical subject. However, he is empowered to do so through his influential community, the GAA community.

Further Nuances and Complexities

It has been shown how identity projects take place through the power networks existent within discursive regimes. In particular it was shown how individuals who prescribe to a particular identity become subjected to the regulatory mechanisms operating within their community. Yet this subjectification operates differently depending on the nature of the community explored. The social dynamic of a village community is seldom arranged in any strategic form, but nonetheless hierarchies and social orders emerge. Within this less structured domain technologies of domination operate in a subtle manner upon individuals. And so young men who continue to operate within the subtleties of this prescriptive discursive regime do so unaware of the power relations weaving through their social actions. As long as they continue to exist with this lack of awareness, there is nothing to resist and so new forms of power relationships cannot emerge.

Alternatively we see the social structure of a sport organization as highly structured, with clear lines of authority. Clear objectives, beliefs and expected modes of conduct are communicated to members, who can then choose to join the club or not. In such a community we can see how technologies of the self can be executed. The role of the individual to work on his self as an ethical subject becomes relevant, as he can position his self in relation to a code of moral practice. And so it can be seen that within strategically less structured communities, where technologies of domination govern, individuals subscribe unwittingly to stipulated modes of being. Meanwhile in organised, highly structured communities individuals can be seen to engage in technologies of the self, choosing to subscribe to instructed ways of being. Fig. 1 illustrates this structure.

However, the role individuals play in their implementation or refusal of a particular type of subjectivity should not be confused with any form of

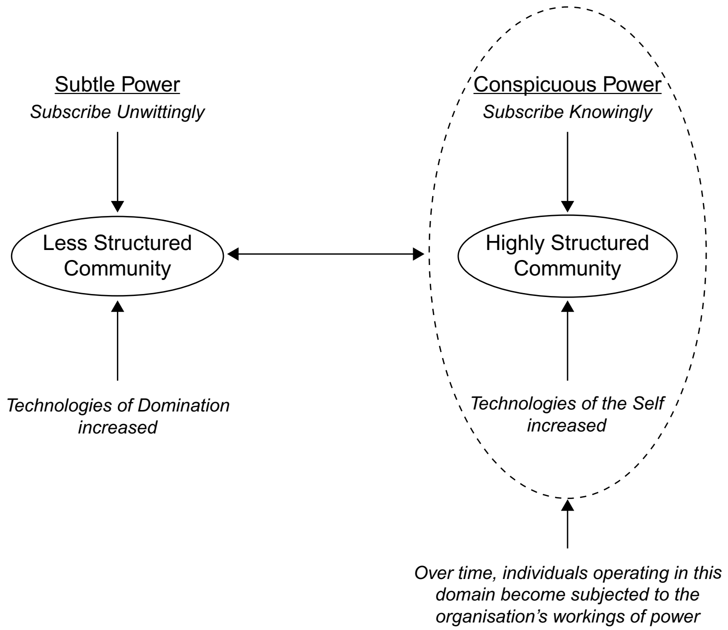

Fig. 1. Diagrammatical Illustration of Power Working through Highly Structured and Less Structured Communities.

social emancipation over those individuals operating within technologies of domination. As these young men subscribe to being a particular type of subject – in this case a Gaelic sportsman – they become subjected to the workings of power that knit through this particular community. When looking at the more highly structured community of the sports organisation, it became evident that while the individual may attempt to transform himself into a desired ethical subject, his work is subject to wider external social influences beyond his own desires and control.

CONTRIBUTION

To conclude, this paper makes a significant contribution to consumer culture theory. By exploring men's existence within wider social networks, I have shown how these social communities come to influence an individual's

life choices and consumption practices. Whether the individual chooses to comply with surrounding social norms or seeks alternative modes of being, I show how he is subject to the workings of power flowing through social networks. Future consumer studies need to shift away from understandings of the individual consumer as an autonomous agent to incorporate instead this social dynamic of human interdependency. Moreover, by looking across separate discursive contexts, I have been able to show how individuals become subjected to differing power forces, depending on the dynamic of each discursive regime.

NOTE

1. The GAA is an Irish sports organisation founded in 1884. It remains a community-led, wholly amateur sporting association.

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CONSIDERING THE HUMAN PROPERTIES OF THE NON-HUMANS: AN ANALYSIS OF PRAGMATOGONY IN DISPOSSESSION STORIES

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Nil Özçağlar-Toulouse

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *Based on Latour's view that humans and non-humans swap properties, this paper explores whether objects embody similar properties as human beings and whether these properties* per se *orient dispossession practices.*

Methodology/approach – *This study adopts Latour's pragmatogonies as a theoretical perspective to explore the complex interplay between humans and non-humans in the context of dispossession. Thirty-two in-depth interviews focus on the object itself (its characteristics, qualities, and capacities in association with its endo and exo relations) to understand how objects act on dispossession.*

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Findings – *The results depict objects as consisting of various material elements and possessing symmetrical properties as humans to facilitate, hinder, and channel dispossession. Objects emerge as having genealogies, undergoing physical changes, adapting to misfortunes, and having citizenship duties.*

Research Limitations/implications – *Our analyses reveal a complex network of people and things; all acting in the course of dispossession. We call for further research on object–subject networks/assemblages as dynamic and co-productive. We suggest that research focus should be on what objects might become or how they connect and evolve as they deteriorate, shift, and renew in interaction with their environment.*

Originality/value of paper – *Our study challenges the dichotomy between material objects and human beings. We underline that objects are not ephemeral and transient but they are moving and circulating as they deteriorate, transform, enact new roles, and construct evolving identities.*

Keywords: Dispossession; object agency; pragmatogony; material

Consumer culture studies increasingly note the mutually reinforcing co-creation of object–subject relations. As a constitutive element, the object is no longer objective matter providing a platform to human action but is instead active in creating and transforming subject and networks (Borgerson, 2005, 2013; Epp & Price, 2010; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011). This articulation expands the subject–object relationship to one that is dynamic and interactive where both the subject and the object "are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other" (Gosden & Marshall, 1999, p. 169; also cited in Epp & Price, 2010, p. 821).

The aim of this study is to contribute to consumer culture research on objects as participants and components of the social world (Borgerson, 2005; Epp & Price, 2010; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011). In particular, we hope to inform on the active participatory role of objects in dispossession. Toward this aim, we use Bruno Latour's pragmatogony to consider how objects may influence, forbid, engage, and direct dispossession. Our analysis of 32 narratives of objects-to-be-disposed amongst consumers shows that objects embody similar properties as human beings and that these properties orient our human action of dispossession.

In the following discussion, we provide insights from Latour's "pragmatogony" and propose that objects may possess similar properties as humans. Following the details of the study, we provide the prominent themes that emerged from the analysis. Our conclusion calls for further research on the swapping properties of humans and non-humans if we are to understand how objects and subjects are "tied up with each other" (Epp & Price, 2010, p. 821).

PRAGMATOGONY

Bruno Latour, often called the Prince of Networks, has become a relevant point of reference for much consumer culture work (i.e., Arsel & Bean, 2013; Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Thomas, Price, & Schau, 2013). However, it appears that Latour's notion of pragmatogony has not reached the current CCT debate on the co-productive object–subject relations.

Essential to Latour's "amodern" scheme and actor-network theory is that there is no essential difference between humans and non-humans (Latour, 2005). By positing that humans and non-humans are not too distinctive animated versus inanimated poles, Latour is able to apply social theories to the non-humans such as walls, microbes, or machines. For example, a door with its complex opening–closing mechanism needs to be understood as a social, historical, and material mixture of elements and transactions that are gathered together into the object (Latour, 1993). In describing Latour's argument, Webmoor and Witmore (2008) account for a pair of eyeglasses as a mixture of diverse ingredients including glass (the material behind which many innovations and transactions between human fire, ovens, and silica took place), aluminum (a metal extracted by bauxite and manipulated by smelting), and optics (a body of mathematical calculation manifested in the curvature of the lens). These various elements or "entities" are constitutive of the object and represent its mixture. Objects are thus a collective assembly of diverse entities (Webmoor & Witmore, 2008). For Latour (1994), understanding this mixture is essential if we are to understand humanity for things not only mediate our social action, "they are us" (p. 807).

Humans and non-humans are thus mixing together as parts of successive and endless chains of associations in which both grow together (Latour, 1994, p. 47). To illustrate the interplay and co-production of humans and non-humans, Latour offers "pragmatogony" – a compound of the Greek

work of materials – pragmata – and the word for creation, gonos. Pragmatogony indicates the co-evolution of humans and non-humans as successive and complex entanglements leading to a swapping or crossover in properties between these differing actants. Latour explains pragmatogonies using society and techniques interacting. From our primitive ancestors to us today, Latour explains that society and techniques have been interacting and identifies 11 layers of sociotechnical crossovers where properties are exchanged. At each society-techniques crossover, changes among humans or the non-humans lead to changes in the other. That is, the non-human tools changed the prehistoric humans to more complex social relations, which in turn created changes in the non-humans. Techniques, in turn, facilitated the socialization of the humans, to the extent that towns and cities were formed and society was recognized. Humans then became components in the development of megamachines, which prefigured the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution in turn necessitated and thus created new forms of human organizations, which came to exhibit new properties. In these sociotechnical associations, "it is through the commerce with nonhumans that the necessary social skills and properties are learned, and it is only by reimporting those skills back to the nonhumans that they are made to do different things and play different roles" (Latour, 1994, p. 804). In the 11th layer of sociotechnical crossovers, named political ecology, Latour discusses how humans are granting political responsibilities on the non-humans, which is drawn from politics of nature. In this layer, a system of obligations that was once largely confined to humans is swapping onto the non-humans of techniques to the point where "today, the whole planet is internalized in the making of our politics, of our legal system, and, soon, of our morality" (Latour, 1994, p. 807).

STUDYING PRAGMATOGONIES IN DISPOSSESSION

Inspired by Latour's 11th layer of sociotechnical association, political ecology, we understand that, due to the ecological crisis, subject–objects relations are transforming. The institutional discourses on environmental degradation, the development of rules for industrial and household dispossession, and the proliferations of recycling guidelines are aspects of this change. However, following Latour, for them to work in practice, these dispossession guidelines need to be layered onto the pre-existing social,

historical, and material mixture that have been gathered into the object. Thus, based on Latour's view on humans and non-humans crossovers, we consider dispossession as a shared responsibility whereby both objects and humans are participants. As co-participants in dispossession, do objects embody similar properties as human beings? Do these properties *per se* orient dispossession?

To answer these questions, 32 in-depth interviews that focused on the object as actant in object–subject relations during dispossession were generated. Importantly, the discussions focused on the object itself, its characteristics, qualities, and capacities in association with its internal and external relations. External relations are an object's relations with the socio-material world. In contrast, internal relations are relations within the object that structure the internal mechanism or function of an object. Going back to the example of the eyeglasses, the object is in constant mediation with the material world; it is required to drive a car (external relations) and is also made of materials; glass, aluminum that associate to form the object (internal relations).

When collecting data on the internal and external object relations, we were attentive to the placings, streams, and conduits associated with dispossession (Gregson, Meltcalfe, & Crewe, 2007). The analysis followed an iterative process, where each interview was first analyzed individually and then was compared with other interviews. This analysis brought about the initial themes to be debated, challenged, and/or contested during discussions between the authors. As the authors iteratively compared and contrasted their interpretations, the initial themes that emerged during their independent analyses were gradually combined into mutually constructed themes with contested meanings.

THE HUMAN PROPERTIES OF THE NON-HUMANS

Our findings show that consumers and consumed objects are part of the same dispossession story and are both actants in the making of this story. We also note that objects exert similar properties as human beings. Like humans, objects have a genealogy, undergo physical transformations, endure accidental events that occur in their environment, and also enact citizenship in that they carry responsibilities for the future well-being of their groups, their society and their planet.

Genealogy

The findings show objects having a historicity that impacts dispossession. Objects were created at a particular time and place, and as such carry within themselves the histories, technologies, and transactions of this particular time (Cherrier & Ponnor, 2003).

Appadurai (1986) and Igor Kopytoff's (1986) work on "the social life of things" and the "cultural biography of things" note that objects change through different "regimes of value" during their course of life, evolving through different social relationships and ritualized practices. In their account, some objects are invested with meanings that are constructed through relations and evolve through time and space. These objects have an existence during which they change and accumulate biographies. In addition to biographical objects, our analysis notes that ordinary objects often belong to particular past. They are linked to families of objects created in a similar period and carry within themselves a genealogy, which impacts dispossession. For example, Allison describes her fridge and microwave in relation with past innovations, techniques, and transactions that are independent from the current owner's symbolic representation of people, places, and time. At the time of the interview, Allison's old fridge was not working, which made it a good candidate for disposal. Yet, whilst she described the item as "*weigh*," Allison was nevertheless reluctant to dispose of "*this old fridge*." At 30 years of age, the fridge carries *within itself* things of the past: history of previous owners and a technology that "*burns a ridiculous amount of coal*." Tracing these historical associations draw awareness on the object's genealogy *itself* with its own inherent meanings, shifting from a simple fridge to "*my husband's grand-mother's fridge*." The fridge's lineage linked to previous technologies and its first owner impact its dispossession. The fridge embodies *within itself* the grand-mother's life stories, as Allison explains – "*that [the fridge] has that history. And that has been passed down lovingly and cherished for all those years. You just can't buy that now*." For Allison, her broken fridge is not waste, a residue of something that used to be valuable. Rather, her broken fridge is part of her ancestry with a clear lineage to her husband's grandmother. Because of the fridge's genealogy, it will be kept and even passed down to her children– "*if I have children*" – and will continue to live with the future generations. Allison's story exemplifies that there are things that objects can do but they do not define the proper being of the objects as objects have not only a dynamic and ongoing identity that is in formation (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986) but also a genealogy. We also note that the fridge does not simply sink its roots deeply

into one owner's life, but rather circulates through different owners, thus expending its family lineage across generations.

The idea of objects having a genealogy requires understandings of the objects not as bundles of qualities nor as a subject's symbolic representation of people, time, and place, but rather in term of objects having, carrying, and imposing their past and histories onto the subject. As illustrated by Allison's broken fridge above, with the passing of time, the object derives its significance from its linkages with the persons and events to which it has been and is connected. Allison's relation with her fridge does not reflect a subject having power over the object but rather an object imposing its out-dated technology and previous owners histories. Because objects have ancestors and descendants, our study shows that they have the power to act and impose their presence on consumers. That is, an item carries *within itself* a genealogy that can exert power over human actions and consequently orient, forbid, or constrain dispossession (Epp & Price, 2010). In effect, Valérie speaks of being unable to get rid of the "*enormous ring*" she inherited from her mother-in-law as a heavy burden and explains "*I don't have the right to lose it, I don't have the right to damage it, I find it scary*." When Valérie once lost sight of the ring, she felt "*an enormous guilt to have lost it with the thought of not being able to find it. When I found it, it was a big relief and at the same time, a burden (laughs) because I was afraid to lose it again*." For Valerie, the ring is more than a remembrance of the past to the present (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). In her narrative, the ring carries within itself an undeletable past, a genealogy that cannot be changed through human agency. As such, an object can limit the freedom of its current owner, forbidding its dispossession.

The genealogy of objects can impact current owners to modify their routines and daily practices (Cherrier, 2010). For example, Louise's non-disposal of some of her clothes exemplifies the object's genealogy not only affecting dispossession but also influencing Louise's diet and exercise regimes. When describing her dispossession practices, Louise explained the impossibility to depart from some of her dresses because of the object's form, "*I kept some of my clothes for over thirty years*." Louise's dresses embrace the youthful thin Louise of 30-years ago. For Louise, the dresses' form represents a desirable attractive identity, which inspired her to transform her body through incessant workout sessions and dieting. Importantly, it is the dresses she kept for over 30 years that helped her regain a thinner body, "*I have lost some weight and I can fit into the dresses I kept for 30 years. I can finally wear them again and I am so happy about that*."

This first theme reveals manifestations of objects' genealogies that disturb, influence, and channel dispossession.

Physical Changes

Our informants' stories of dispossession are not stories of subjects dealing with passive objects nor do they depict human beings taking control over the symbolic of an object. The consumers in this study raised issues of dispossession in relation to the gradual physical development (or lack of development) of the object *itself*. The physical developments are linked to an aging process, and to possibilities for transformation and to accidents that occur in the object's environment.

Aging

In all narratives, our informants discussed the objects evolving through different life cycles, at times young and beautiful and at others old and torn. Objects grow old and become tattered along the life span of their owner. Importantly, objects grow old at different rhythm, at times slower and at other times faster than the way their environment and owners age. For example, Kathy below explains how the aging of her clothes prompted dispossession.

> Kathy: if you've worn things and they're just sort of become a bit daggy. Then I like to look nice and I wouldn't wear them again.
>
> Interviewer: Can you tell me what daggy means?
>
> Kathy: Daggy? A bit old, so they might be a bit old and … when you get these little bubbles on you, these little fluffy things on your clothes.

Kathy does not describe any emotional attachment to the object. In contrast to previous studies on dispossession that emphasize the emotional and psychological difficulties to let go of material possessions (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005; Lucas, 2002; McAlexander, 1991; Ozanne, 1992; Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000), Kathy's story underlines the gradual transformation of the object leading to dispossession. In this story, the object does not embrace emotional or symbolic qualities and characteristics. It is instead an aging object, "*a bit old, when you get these little bubbles on you*," aging faster than the owner who "likes to look nice" and, as such, is thrown away. It is important to note that the change in Kathy's clothes occurs beyond her control. The fast aging clothes push Kathy to dispose of them.

In this illustration of dispossession, we underline that both Kathy and the aging objects share responsibility. It is the aging process of the objects that left Kathy without much choice but to let go of them.

From the analysis, objects that age at a "natural" phase and in concurrence with its environment go through a less problematic dispossession cycle than objects that age in different phases, effectively complicating dispossession.

Accidents

Considering the stories on the transformation of the object, we note that objects often take on new roles, adapting to changes or events that occur in their environment and consequently constructing new life stories. For example, in Kathy's excerpt below, the lamp suddenly broke. Disabled, the lamp could no longer perform its assigned role. This physical change of the lamp led Kathy to reflect on its dispossession.

> Kathy: I broke a table lamp that was particularly nice table lamp and I had to learn how to throw that away, so I didn't put that in the recycling because I don't know if I could because it's got an electrical cord on it. And I couldn't give it to the charity shop because it was broken so it had to go in the bin.

Kathy is concerned with environmental preservation and explains being "*very upset*" when not giving her old items to charities. With the lamp, the broken materiality did not afford the possibility to give the object to charity. Its material transformation dictated the object to "*the bin*." That is, just as events that occur in our environment are capable of perturbing our life as human beings (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Kleine & Kleine, 2000), these same events are capable of *directly* perturbing the life trajectory of objects.

Importantly, objects respond differently to accidents in their environment. Some objects succumbed to accidental misfortunes whilst others preserve their own being and resist being disposed of by adopting different roles. For example, some of our informants explained keeping objects independent of environmental changes. For example, Nelly explains that "*when I move house, or when I'm cleaning my room now, or when I'm going to travel overseas. I get rid of quite a few things.*" However, such perturbations do not affect all objects. Some objects come to enact new roles in a new environment such as an indoor table that is now used as an outdoor table on the deck or a small TV cabinet has been transformed and is now used for the plants.

> Nelly: I would not throw away my table I guess, I use it outdoor now that I have a deck but it used to be an indoor table and my small TV cabinet that I re-painted and

now my plants sit on it and I love it. Well, I have painted it and I actually like what I did to it.

Whilst some objects survive changes in their environment, enacting new roles and identity, others do not survive changes in their environment. Because the role of a "TV cabinet" versus a "furniture to hold plants" share little to no resemblances, we argue that, in each new role, the object adopts a new identity with new relations with their environment including space, time, and owner. These new relations do not result from fixed properties of the object, but rather objects swapping properties with Nelly's nomadic lifestyle.

In addition to accidents linked to breakages or the owner's life change, we note accidents in terms of other objects coming and interfering with the object's life trajectory. For example, Simge explains transforming a shower curtain because of the new arrival of the glass cabin.

Simge: I have this shower curtain but now I had a glass cabin in my shower. So, I plan to transform it into a cover for my hamper. And perhaps a toilet seat cover too … with the remaining fabric … It has a similar design with the one on my washing machine. So, it will be like a trio in the bathroom.

Through Simge's planned alterations, the shower curtain will transform into a cover set and resist the idleness and potential dispossession. Because objects age in a changing environment, they need to adapt to these changes. In adopting this new role, the curtain survives the changes (the glass shower cabinet) in its current environment (bathroom).

In this story, an object continually encounters turbulences, leading to new formations, then, new turbulences and decay occur, leading again to another set of formations, that again will lead to rates and sequences of decay and decline. This spiral that shifts, erodes, and renews appears endless, not because of the subject exerting control over the object, but because of the object capable of adapting to its environment, embracing new set of formations, and exercising new roles and functions, thus swapping properties with humans in the process.

The notion of transformability of matter opposes to the fixity implied by the concept of transitional goods, which emphasizes that, once perceived as redundant or obsolete, goods transit to waste (Thompson, 1979). In contrast to object and its imperatives to waste when damaged, our informants discuss the transformation and renewal of objects.

In sum, events occur in the environment of the objects and these events are capable of perturbing the object. In surviving misfortunes, objects take on new forms or come to embody new roles, owners and life directions;

embracing different properties and producing new qualitative differences in new circumstances.

Citizenship

Clear to our informants' stories is that dispossession does not solely represent a departure from the object but is also an engagement with the citizenship of the object. As citizens, objects actively connect with the future well-being of their group, their society and their planet.

Civic Responsibility

While objects provide consumers with a comfortable life and enhance the well-being of society, their accumulation can also highlight social inequality and imply wastefulness. Objects carry within themselves the responsibility to help others in need, to share, and participate in the well-being of humanity. By moving toward where they are needed, objects can reinstate social justice and enhance the social welfare. For example, Alan explains below being "*stuck*" with two washing machines:

> Alan: I have a small washing machine at my place so my sisters – two of my sisters and their husband and everyone moved to my place. They came from [city] so that was a bigger family at that time so I had to buy another washing machine which is a bigger one. So now, they have moved – after three years, they moved to another place. So I have got – I'm stuck with two washing machines and one sitting there doing nothing.

Alan describes that the washing machine is now "*just sitting in the garage doing nothing*." Yet, Alan enjoys giving away his possessions; he explains "*it makes you feel proud if you're helping the people who need it*." Since his family's departure, Alan tried to give away his extra-washing machine – "*I put an ad so that somebody can take it for free as well but nobody wants it. It works fine and everything is good*." Yet, no one replied to the ad, leaving Alan in search for someone who would need and use it.

Thus, objects have responsibilities toward their functionality as also illustrated by Stan, who explains below how not using an object forced him to circulate it to new owners:

> Stan: I once had a leaf blower and a whipper snipper. They were both good, and I probably should have used them more than I did. I did not use them, like leaf blowing just seems pointless because you're just moving it to another spot, and then it's just gonna blow back. Then you're just wasting your time. So we didn't use the leaf blower for 7 years. It just lived in a box until it went to the Salvos.

The responsibility of the item to provide utility led Stan to eventually give it to the charity. For some object groups that are physically large, the responsibility to provide usage to owners is the most prominent factor in their dispossession.

Environmental Preservation

Our informants discussed their material belongings in connection with broad issues such as environmental issues and guidelines for its preservation. In the narratives, objects enact responsibilities embedded in discussions of environmental preservation and recycling. For example, Rana, below, unconsciously started to pick up waste off the street in Iran to recycle it:

> Rana: I remember going back to Iran and on one of my trips and we went on a trip completed with a hike. And I had been in Australia for a while … and I mean, in Iran, people used to, not anymore I don't think, but used to just throw their rubbish out. Like if you had a pack of chips, then you're just walking on the streets, you just dropped the pack of chips from your hand, and that was it, not your problem anymore. And I remember walking, packing up and I had a plastic bag and I realized that I had been picking up rubbish on the way and putting it in a plastic bag. And I only realized it because someone who was with me started laughing at me, like "what the fuck are you doing?" You know? That's when I noticed the difference in culture.

For Rana, the rubbish on the street in Iran did not belong to the street but had to be recycled. The historical moment of rubbish is located in discourses of environmental awareness and as such influences Rana to pick it up and direct it to a particular dispossession conduit. We note that the materiality of rubbish is not fixed but established and evolving in and through existing culture and historical moments, thus changing the world around us, even if we are not aware of it (Borgerson, 2013).

These findings show that objects belong to categories of matter and carry responsibilities toward their specific categories and belongings. As Macit emphasizes, "cans, I take them to the recycle bins in the neighbourhood. Everything that can be recycled, I take there … The batteries too. I saw separate bins for them. I was surprised. Papers, I recycle at work … But, diapers, we trash them, cannot put them through recycling … Even bread that got tough, we put it in a bag and hang it outside the apartment for people to take." Harry's dispossession process, on the other hand, incorporates the de-assembling of the object from some of its elements. Harry de-assembled his radio to extract its steel – "*the steel goes to the recycle bin*"; a practice which reminds him of the Smokey Mountains in the Philippines where "*hundreds of people literally, digging into the garbage*" "*cleaning out the garbage dump*." Harry differentiates between "*pure waste, like food*

scraps and building material, which, you know, deteriorate in time" versus "*total waste. Human waste*" which includes plastics, paper, rubber, or old communications gears. Similarly, Matt, as a waste management officer practices what Kathy describes as the "*rummaging through all the stuff*" whereby people "*take everything apart and even down to machines and they'll take out the electronics and all the metal and all the plastic and it's all done separately*." For Matt, objects are made of metals, wood, plastic, and each element respond to the laws of matter and need to follow a particular recycling conduit.

This theme emphasizes the citizenship of objects. Whilst individuals negotiate the value and the symbolic of the object during dispossession (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005), the object also negotiates with human sensibility in account of its owner, social justice, and environmental degradation. Instead of being passive, each object discussed in this study plays a role in our collective future in ways of enabling, constraining, or directing dispossession.

CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study notes that objects have a genealogy, undergo physical changes, adapt to misfortunes, and have citizenship duties. We argue that objects not only have a life (Halitim, 1996) and a biography (Appadurai, 1986; Hoskins, 1998; Kopytoff, 1986), but carry within themselves an undeletable connection to past technologies, innovations, and owners, and have an existence suffering the passing of time and changes that occur in the environment. In their relations with humans, objects swap properties; they have genealogies and historicity, age, transform, and adapt to misfortunes, and respond to citizenship duties. We concur that understanding objects as embodying similar properties to human beings has important implications for different consumption domains including dispossession.

Our study emphasizes the interlinking of human beings and material objects during dispossession. In addition to consumers discarding objects as means of self-expression, group affiliation, remembrance, and self-projection (e.g., McAlexander, 1991) or as a response to cultural classifications of dirt and pollution, we find consumers responding to the transformative power of things. We note that material objects are not passive; succumbing to the functions, imprint, and encryption of symbolic meanings ascribed by the subject. In contrast and drawing on Latour's

works, objects are more uncertain, heterogeneous, complicated, historical, and networked. From our analysis, we argue that objects carry genealogies, react and transform to the passing of time and variations in their environment, and enact citizenship duties, which impact dispossession. We thus reveal a complex network of people and things; all acting in the course of dispossession.

Understanding objects as actants destabilizes the dichotomy between material objects and human beings and contribute to the current concern that established binaries or dualism may not reflect inherent reality (Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Kozinets, 2008). To date, material culture studies often portray the subjects purchasing, making, using, collecting, and discarding objects to fulfill utilitarian or symbolic means. Things are perceived as passive until imprinted of utilitarian functions or symbolic meanings by the subject. In contrast, we argue that objects should be considered outside of the current subject–object dialectic whereby the subject often seems to exercise power over the object. In describing the similarities between humans and objects; we offer a more symmetrical view of object/people relationship.

Furthermore, we note that objects are not ephemeral and transient but are rather moving and circulating as they deteriorate, transform, enact new roles and functions, and, in the process, impact human actions. Gregson et al. (2007) show how surplus of things are moved through specific conduits that can act back on the consumer. We support that objects move along different conduits and note that the movement occurs because objects physically transform over time, they deteriorate, shift, and renew in response to the passing of time and environmental changes (Ingold, 2011). The deterioration, shift, and renewal of objects represent a spiral toward which the object gradually evolves through and toward specific conduits. Conceptualizing the movement of objects as spirals during which objects deteriorate, shift, and renew helps better understand how specific conduits can act back on the consumer (Gregson et al., 2007; Ingold, 2011). In effect, an object in process of shifting or renewal may create guilt, anxiety, and issues of care, and thus end or orient dispossession.

We call for further research on the object–subject networks or assemblages as dynamic and co-productive. One question can be on how networks and assemblage produce reflexivity or offer the capacity for object networks to be self-organizing. In this line of study, the analysis should not be on what is the object, but rather on what the object might become or how it might connect or evolve as it swirls in spirals through which it deteriorates, shifts, and renews in interactions with its environment.

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HOLD THE LINE! EXPLORING THE BRAND COMMUNITY COPING PROCESS

Henri Weijo and Jukka Rintamäki

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The purpose of this study is to investigate how brand communities collectively react towards brand transgressions, an area where previous research has been scant.*

Methodology/approach – *This study adopts a netnographic approach in studying the reactions of one particular brand community and its reactions to a marketer-initiated brand transgression.*

Findings – *Building on coping theory, we find evidence of brand community coping, a temporally bounded process in which the community seeks to come to terms with and even overturn the transgression. Overall, we define the brand community coping process as unfolding through three overlapping and temporally bounded stages of (1) making the problem communal, (2) exploring the problem's meaning, and (3) co-creating responses.*

Originality/value – *Studies of consumer coping particularly in cases of brand transgressions have predominantly adopted an individualistic*

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approach to coping, or have treated communities as coping resources for individual consumers. This study is the first study to truly look at brand communities' collective coping endeavors. We also offer managerial implications by questioning the overtly positive tone of brand co-creation literature and underline potential threats to marketers when consumers decide to use their co-creative practices to punish the marketer.

Keywords: Case study; netnography; brand community; brand transgression; community coping

The relationship between consumers and marketers is often marked with tensions. Previous consumer research has predominantly dealt with individual consumers' reactions to marketer transgressions (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Ward & Ostrom, 2006) or with brand communities' ongoing efforts to resist or otherwise undermine marketers through collective action (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). However, research on how brand communities mobilize themselves at critical junctures of brand relationships, particularly transgressions or the end of a brand narrative, has been scant (see Russell & Schau, 2014).

This study investigates how a brand community reacts to a marketer-caused transgression through a temporally process of *communal coping* (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). We see the brand community coping process unfolding through three overlapping stages: (1) making the problem communal, (2) exploring the problem's meaning, and (3) co-creating responses. We draw from a netnographic inquiry (Kozinets, 2010) into the drama surrounding the release of the video game Mass Effect 3, which the brand community considered a betrayal of the brand relationship and especially the substantial co-creative efforts by the community to help build the brand. We also elaborate on the problematics of communal coping and its implications for both brand communality and co-creation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

When an individual is confronted by a traumatic event, it will likely prompt him or her to seek a resolution or closure through coping (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pennebaker & Harber, 1993). Extant views emphasize the

inherent dynamism of coping processes, particularly that the stages between the transgression and coming to terms are often overlapping (e.g., Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Russell & Schau, 2014; Silver, Wortman, & Crofton, 1990). Previous research has also demarcated between coping strategies that are (1) task-oriented (engaging in action to overturn or mitigate the stressor), (2) emotion-oriented (managing emotional turmoil or finding closure), and (3) avoidance-oriented (seeking ways to not be reminded of stressor) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, individual coping efforts often combine elements from each, as people often move between emotional management and taking action to rectify the situation, depending on the availability of coping resources or capabilities (Duhachek, 2005). Quite naturally, the more emotionally destabilizing the trauma, the greater the need for coping and its expected length (Hobfoll, 2001). That said, a coping strategy can fail. For example, a person may give up on coping due to emotional fatigue, which may even lead to lengthy and counterproductive dwelling on negative emotions via rumination (Martin & Tesser, 1989).

Coping has been identified to occur both *in* and *through* consumption (e.g., Aaker et al., 2004; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Duhachek (2005) formulates eight distinct consumer coping strategies which he further classifies as (1) cognitively or behaviorally taking action, including engaging in rational thinking, (2) marshaling social support resources and engaging in emotional venting, and (3) avoiding or denying the stressor altogether. Again, these strategies can overlap as for example spreading negative word of mouth or boycotting can combine elements of action-taking, support-seeking, and emotional venting (e.g., Schmalz & Orth, 2012). Recent studies have shown interest in coping in brand relationships and *brand transgressions*, which is defined as one party (usually the marketer) breaking the relationship's trust by acting against existing relationship norms, often for personal or financial gain (Aaker et al., 2004; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). The recent research interest in brand transgressions has largely emerged because of corporations' increased efforts to foster brand relationships with consumers, or at least emphasize relationship aspects in marketing communications (e.g., Schmalz & Orth, 2012; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). This interest has further intensified as consumers are increasingly grooming their brand relationships in brand communities, leading to marketer interest in value co-creation (e.g., Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).

The increasingly communal nature of consumers' brand relationships leads us to two suggestions. First, a marketer-caused transgression on a co-created brand will in all likelihood hit consumers harder, as it is not

only a breach of the brand relationship but also the co-creative trust. Second, if consumers are indeed grooming their brand relationships in brand communities, then it is also likely that coping efforts become increasingly communal as well. But consumer research has yet to fully investigate such collective coping activities, as social sciences overall have concentrated on individual coping (Lyons et al., 1998; Pennebaker & Harber, 1993).

Previous coping studies have acknowledged social dimensions of coping and even many individually-oriented coping studies see social support as a key coping resource (Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Russell & Schau, 2014). For example, peer groups can be helpful in making sense of the trauma by validating the victim's reaction to the stressor, or by providing emotional support in the working through phases (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998; Russell & Schau, 2014). Previous research has also identified a positive correlation between the size of support networks and the likelihood of reaching a positive resolution (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Silver et al., 1990). However, the role of support varies on the nature of the trauma, the consequent match with the individual's support networks, and how the individual perceives their availability in coping (Lyons et al., 1998). Sometimes support networks can even significantly hinder coping efforts, via for example inducing shame or fear of reliving the event or by offering bad support (Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Silver et al., 1990).

When a transgression hits a group of people, it may engage in *communal coping*, which changes the coping dynamic (Lyons et al., 1998; Silver et al., 1990). For one, it increases the likelihood of group members seeking support from others, as fellow trauma victims are likely to share a similar disposition to the event and be in need of reciprocal support (Hobfoll, 2001; Lyons et al., 1998; Silver et al., 1990). Communal coping also allows the community to pool its resources and assign people to suitable coping roles (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lyons et al., 1998). By consequence, communal coping has a clearer tendency to orient people towards active problem solving rather than managing emotional upheaval (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1996). However, not all communities are equally equipped to engage in coping processes, for example due to a lack of social ties (Lyons et al., 1998; Pennebaker & Harber, 1993). Communal coping may also cause significant harm to members' coping efforts (Lyons et al., 1998). For example, Hobfoll and London (1986) show that the initial benefits of being able to cope with fellow trauma victims may quickly evaporate if the community becomes overwhelmed by the surrounding negativity. Silver et al. (1990) suggest that particularly those who the community sees as being best

able to provide coping support, such as senior members, can easily become overburdened with coping work.

There are elements in prior brand community studies that link to communal coping. For example, previous studies have shown that the effective division of roles based on skill, the cultivation of social ties, and fostering like-mindedness are all extremely helpful in orienting the community for collective action, much like in coping (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schau et al., 2009). The emergence of the internet has also enabled not only new forms of communality, but also provides a new avenue for coping efforts – particularly by transforming previously private complaining on marketer misdeeds into public and communal (Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2011; St. James, Handelman, & Taylor, 2011; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). However, we also know that due to their imaginary and geographically liberated nature, brand communities are more likely based on looser member ties than regular communities and as such may have less potential for communal coping (e.g., Schau et al., 2009; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Brand communities in online spaces are also more prone to see conflict emerge both within the community as well as between the community and the marketer (e.g., Cova & Pace, 2006; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

In our view, Muñiz and Schau's (2005, 2007) two studies of the abandoned Apple Newton community come close to exemplifying communal coping. The authors describe a community betrayed by the marketer, leaving the community to perpetuate itself by constantly reliving the betrayal through stories with religious overtones. The 2007 study also identified that consumers would engage in "vigilante marketing" to undercut the betrayer marketer, hinting at active rumination (Martin & Tesser, 1989). However, previous studies do not fully explain communal coping, as the activities were more longer term or continuous endeavors. Coping, on the other hand, is a bounded and relatively short-term process where behavior is temporarily reoriented to manage the transgression (e.g., Hobfoll, 2001; Lyons et al., 1998). The Apple Newton studies show what happens when a community coping process has more or less run its course, but they do not fully explain the community's activities during the crucial first weeks after the betrayal, and how the community arrived to its current state of rumination.

St. James et al.'s (2011) study of magical thinking in weight loss communities and Russell and Schau's (2014) study on consumers' coming to terms with the end of narrative brands are two of the only coping studies that feature both communality and coping as central constructs. But again, the focus in both studies was more on individual coping, and the community mostly served as a coping resource for its members. We wish to extend

these works by looking at coping as a communal effort, and particularly as a temporally bounded process (Lyons et al., 1998). This leads to our research question of *how brand communities that have helped co-create the brand engage in communal coping in the context of marketer transgressions*. We will elaborate on our context and the nature of the case transgression next.

CONTEXT AND METHOD

Our case of a brand transgression relates to the drama surrounding the final installment of the video game trilogy Mass Effect (ME), produced by Bioware. The original ME (released in 2007) was a sci-fi role-playing game set in the 22nd century, characterized by strong character interaction, player freedom in character development, a powerful plot, and third-person shooter action sequences. After the first installment, Bioware began to systematically embrace co-creation by reaching out to its fans through its own online forum Bioware Social Network (BSN) for insight and feedback (Hong & Chen, 2013). ME2 was released in 2010 with new publisher EA, to wide acclaim.

An important element in the ME saga is the ability to transfer characters from the first game all the way to the third game, meaning that your personalized character narratives carry over throughout the trilogy. Prior to the release of the final part of the trilogy, much of the anticipation in the brand community concerned Bioware's ability to create an ending where different player choices would converge properly. Bioware recognized this and made the importance of the ending a key selling point in its marketing communications, heightening expectations. When ME3 launched on March 6, 2012, it received predominantly positive reviews from gaming media, but fan reception was markedly more mixed. For many ME fans the ending failed to live up to the promise of an integrated ending, creating a severe lack of closure, and a heavy sense of betrayal (Carroll, 2007; Russell & Schau, 2014).

After the game's launch, both present authors began following the transgression individually out of personal interest. Prior to the research project both authors had played through ME and ME2, and the second author even enjoyed a lurker status at BSN. We engaged in a collaborative inquiry in mid April 2012 at a time when the transgression was still *in media res*. We relied on netnographic inquiry predominantly in the BSN community

and its ME sub forums for data gathering (Kozinets, 2010). We also followed incoming and outgoing links from and to BSN, leading to observation at multiple secondary sources dedicated to gaming. The fieldwork concluded at the end of 2013. All in all, our data set consisted of roughly 200 threads dedicated to the transgression from the Bioware forums and a roughly equal amount of secondary sources, including YouTube videos, web images, blog posts, news reports etc. Our familiarity and personal interest in the brand guided and influenced our research, but also necessitated distancing by actively seeking negative cases and engaging in diachronic analysis (Spiggle, 1994). Data gathering and analysis was largely overlapping and we continuously engaged with literature throughout the research project (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

FINDINGS

We adopted Lyons et al.'s (1998) model of communal coping as an orienting framework for our analysis. We found that the brand community coping process to a large degree follows a similar pattern, but the brand community context and particularly the different co-creative practices alter the flow of the coping process. Thus, we define the brand community coping process as occurring through three stages overlapping stages: (1) making the problem communal, (2) exploring the problem's meaning, and (3) co-creating responses.

Making the Problem Communal

Even if a community deems a transgression having happened to one member, a community can nonetheless mobilize itself to help or protect one member that has been wronged (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). That said, true communal coping commences when "one or more individuals perceive a stressor as 'our' problem (a social appraisal) vs 'my' or 'your' problem (an individualistic) appraisal, and activates a process of shared or collaborative coping" (Lyons et al., 1998, p. 583). In the case of ME3, the transgression had to be first experienced by playing through the game and having a reaction to it on an individual level (Rimé et al., 1998). Even before the game was released many "playthrough commentary" threads emerged in advance on the BSN forums where members vowed to post updates on their

gameplay experiences and even compete on who would finish the game first. The first players had finished the game within 48 hours of the game's release, so when members begun to see that others had experienced the ending as disappointing, a shared sense of betrayal began to emerge.

A community internalizes the communal coping orientation through voicing that the transgression was done to "us," fostering a "we" orientation (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). Usually those who feel the most hurt may seek to mobilize others and emphasize the transgression being about "all of us" (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). With ME3, some took the ending so hard that they began to upload videos to services like YouTube to voice their opinions:

> Anyway, I'm kind of in shock of it all, I guess … I don't know why I decided to do this video. I guess I thought it would be a talking point for people, um, you know … I'm sure that there are a lot of people who feel the same way that I do. And, um, I guess I want Bioware to see it. Just because, you know. I mean … […] But um, you made a bad decision. I mean that's all there is to it. Just a bad decision, bad ending, I mean … Bad ending to one of the more important video game franchises in history. (Netnographic fieldnote, transcribed from YouTube video "Mass Effect 3 – My reaction to the bullshit ending of Mass Effect 3" by "ShockblastMedia")

The excerpt confirms that the transgression was brought upon a lack of closural force of the brand narrative's ending (Carroll, 2007; Russell & Schau, 2014) and it also displays a known response to traumatic events: the need to begin sharing about the traumatic event and to seek people who have been similarly afflicted (Rimé et al., 1998). Also, the poster intuits that he is "not alone" with his thoughts and wants to use the video as springboard for more discussion, showing that a shared reaction to the ending had not yet become widely known. Overall, it is our interpretation that the communal orientation with ME3 emerged organically rather than through the purposeful maneuvering of "crusading" members against the marketer (Lyons et al., 1998; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). We believe this helped create a stronger communal orientation to coping than if it had been "manufactured."

The transgression also worked as a vehicle for attracting new members (Lyons et al., 1998). We saw examples of members posting that they "had to register to post" because they had been so shocked by the ending. In the first week after the game's release multiple threads were posted on the Bioware forums that addressed the ending directly and asked the community to share their thoughts. Most early responses were relatively unelaborate and simply conveyed confusion, disbelief, or anger. At this stage the community became more cohesive, as the transgression emerged as a "beneficial social goal that transcends their immediate interests" (Kozinets & Handelman,

2004, p. 693), uniting the community against a common threat. A transgression can thus help accelerate the transition of brand community members from peripheral members such as lurkers to contributors (Kozinets, 1999).

Exploring the Problem's Meaning

Once a transgression is understood as a communal problem, the community will begin exploring the problem's meaning by airing out multiple emotional responses to it (Lyons et al., 1998). This stage is a marked by extensive meaning-making where old understandings are re-examined and new ones created (Aaker et al., 2004). With ME3, the community's discussion early in this stage manifested itself through "cathartic venting" regarding the transgressing product (e.g., Kowalski, 1996; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2011). We see cathartic venting mostly taking place in the liminal space between the first two stages of coping. The venting manifests usually in unnuanced writing, conveying a sense of disbelief and even denial:

> […] I've never seen such public backlash to an ending before (mass effect 3). How could Bioware let this happen? I'm at a certain part in ME3 I'm scared of moving forward in the game. Every fiber of my being is telling me to NOT finish Mass Effect 3. Why man? Why do I have to worry about this? (Netnographic fieldnote, thread "I refuse to believe that Mass Effect 3 ending sucks that bad. Is this for real?," Luzarius)

As the excerpt shows, the transgression has immediately questioned Bioware's stewardship of the brand and even caused the poster to re-evaluate his or her view of the company. Cathartic venting can in many ways be beneficial for the community's coping efforts as expressive writing can accelerate the coping process and increase perceptions of fairness (Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2011; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990). However, cathartic venting particularly in online communities can also accentuate negative emotions. The lack of social ties in online communities may lead to exaggerated rhetoric regarding the seriousness of the transgression or one-upmanship to secure a better "position" for coping support (Hobfoll, 2001; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). In the case of ME3, extreme rhetoric was not an uncommon sight in our fieldwork.

An important element in brand transgressions is to identify responsibility and lay blame accurately (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). After the early venting period the community begins to express a wider variety of emotions and meanings relating to the transgression, reflecting more on the brand and the brand relationship. For example, some of the most grief-stricken

fans began to proclaim that the ending rendered the entire effort put into the series obsolete, effectively ruining hundreds of hours of playing time dedicated to the game and ruining any chance of reconsumption (Russell & Levy, 2012). Much of the meaning exploration occurred through practices similar to brand curating (Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Schau et al., 2009) where members would collect and post external source material from blogs, YouTube and other media to support their views on the transgression within discussion threads and to catalogue the saga of the transgression (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). If the media artifact was from a prominent enough source, it usually warranted a discussion thread of its own. For example, when Forbes magazine picked up on the ending controversy, the community took it as a validation of their plight and encouraged its members to share the story in social media.

Bioware also had its defenders in the community, and the company's long history as a trusted and co-creative marketer most likely dampened a lot of the reactions and calls for punishment (Wright, Dinsmore, & Kellaris, 2013). Some Bioware diehards were also willing to place the root cause of the transgression as being outside Bioware's control, as a result of marketplace dynamics. In fact, much of the language that utilized classic framings of "oppressive marketers," which often emerges in brand transgressions (Ward & Ostrom, 2006), was directed at parent company EA rather than Bioware. Some even felt that the Bioware had had been "forced" by EA to cater to the tastes of more casual gamers, placing some of the blame on other consumers as enablers of bad behavior (Dodge, Edwards, & Fullerton, 1996). Also, the enormous volume and high intensity of the negative feedback prompted some to defend Bioware to cool down some of the overt negativism.

In the previous stage of coping the transgression acted as "useful drama" that helped galvanize the community to discuss proper behavior and reify meanings (Fournier & Lee, 2009). But at this stage we began to witness a steady increase in dissent and a fragmentation of the community's coping efforts. Placing the blame on less casual gamers illustrates that coping can also create issues of who are "authentic" fans of the brand based on their reactions to the transgression (Beverland, Farrelly, & Quester, 2010). For example, one of the most vocal community factions championed the idea that the ending was not botched, but rather a brilliant artistic coup (a view later discredited by Bioware). While we believe that this faction was predominantly driven by status-seeking, it may also have had elements of wishful fantasizing (St. James et al., 2011). One community member offered that the idea of an artistic ending was appealing because "it was about

a thousand times better and more interesting than all the endings Bioware gave us" while another agreed that it was "a work of denial." Nevertheless, the example shows that the coping process also opens the door for status-seeking opportunities, which significantly hinders maintaining communal goals (Kozinets, 2002).

In addition to status-oriented breakaways from a common direction of communal coping, some also began to show emotional fatigue due to over-saturation of discussion relating to the transgression. For example, in a thread titled "the endings suck" two posters bemoan that "so what the 50th thread on this now? we get it." and "I'm done complaining about the endings. It is what it is." In a thread titled "So the ending sucked … but i can live with that" a community member mentions the transgression having occurred "a few weeks ago" and this was a proper time to move on. This is consistent with previous studies on how long most people have the energy to engage in negativity before either failing or in a sense accepting the transgression and engaging in avoidance strategies (Pennebaker & Harber, 1993).

Co-Creating Responses

In the last stage of the coping process, the community will translate the different novel meanings into a shared direction for collective action as well as charismatic communal artifacts produced through co-creative practices (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Schau et al., 2009). Even outside a "true" brand transgression, a discrepancy between what a community feels about a brand and how the marketer portrays it marketing communications can push the community to engage in vigilante advertising (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). But in the case of a transgression, this urge becomes even more profound. This stage also marks a shift in emphasis from emotional management to task and goal-oriented coping efforts (Lyons et al., 1998).

After a transgression consumers seek to reclaim some lost esteem by making the marketer understand the error of its ways (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). While a lot of the community's punishment was dealt out already in the previous section, we also witnessed some newer manifestations. One novel form of punishment was the promotion of competitive brands, which we liken to revenge consumption (Elliott, Eccles, & Gournay, 1996). We see this as an extreme form of consumers cutting all ties to the brand and attempting to smudge the brand from their identities

(Russell & Schau, 2014). But aside from punishing the marketer, many activities within this stage were dedicated to maintaining public awareness of the transgression. The community channeled the emergent meanings of the coping process into co-created artifacts that we roughly divide two categories of *informational* and *entertaining* content.

The informational artifacts mostly featured analysis of the ending and presented arguments to change the ending. Many of these artifacts were in video form, and often showed a great degree of effort. For example, some videos dissecting the ending clocked well over an hour and had voice-over commentary, background music, and professional quality video editing. They were also marked by the use of ME "lingo" in efforts to boost their credibility (Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Schau et al., 2009). These videos often featured links to content that offered similar arguments, creating networks of subtribes within the brand community (Kozinets, 1999). Threads discussing these videos within the Bioware forums often ballooned to hundreds of replies and the members who engaged in these discussions were predominantly hard core ME fans who had taken the transgression more to heart. In this sense, the informational stream of content demarcated between more engaged community members and more peripheral members (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). Some of these initiatives were highly polarizing. Partly this was due to radical language (some posts even had death threats directed at Bioware), but also because they framed their arguments through claims of superior brand fandom (Beverland et al., 2010).

The entertainment stream of content was in terms of sheer volume much more prominent, and we often encountered it outside the brand community. In the case of the abandoned Apple Newton brand and its community, a lot of the community-generated content was very confrontational towards the marketer (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). With ME3, this was true within the informational stream, but the entertainment stream was in our view predominantly based on content that displayed whimsical humor and absurdist parodying. We see two explanations for this. For one, the emphasis on humor and particularly irony is increasingly the direction into which cyberculture is evolving, due to the growing influence of internet memes (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Shifman, 2011). Indeed, a substantial portion of the entertainment stream was in the form of ME meanings inserted into classic internet memes (Shifman, 2011). Second, we believe that the community adopted parody and humor because it mitigated the risk of emotional fatigue in coping caused by the constant reminding of the emotional stress of the transgression (Hobfoll, 2001). This brings the entertainment stream very close to culture jamming (Carducci, 2006), where the use of humor

and prankster spirit has been recognized as an effective way to work against the marketer almost indefinitely without losing audience interest. Furthermore, a prevalent aspect of culture jamming is the continuous challenging of marketers' control for cultural spaces (Rumbo, 2002). Within the ME community some would continuously comment on posts by Bioware on the ME3 Facebook page in the vein of "Hey that's great, still a terrible ending" regardless of the topic of the post. We also saw evidence of meme-like content made portray ME fans as crybabies, though these often came from without the community.

Fan fiction combined elements of informational and entertaining, specifically alternative endings that community members wrote both individually and collectively (Jenkins, 2006). Some community-generated projects grew to such proportions that they had legs beyond the coping process. For example, a web comic called "Marauder Shields" (MS), which was originally created to sarcastically ridicule the bad ending, ended up being so popular that it shifted its tone and focus to a more seriously produced fan fiction and is still being produced regularly. In our view, particularly alternative endings were very helpful for some members in achieving closure. For example, one member described MS as "a nice way to see Mass Effect finished off. Made dealing with the ending a bit easier to take" and another called MS "my canon ending after the craptastic event that is Bioware's treatment of ME3."

A few months after the release of the original game, Bioware decided to release an "extended cut" (EC) as a free add-on to satisfy fans' need for narrative closure. The EC seemed to have been enough to calm down the majority of fan critics and it made for a symbolic ending to the controversy. The community understood that the EC was probably as big a concession as they were going to get from Bioware, with one member describing the ending having gone from "'terrible' to 'okay' and that's a huge step." However, the EC did not appease all the factions that had emerged during the coping process. The ending still gets referenced somewhat frequently on BSN, and some recent comments have shown rumination (Martin & Tesser, 1989). For example, on the anniversary of the EC's release one member commented "Happy anniversary to the end of my buying anything more from Bioware!," illustrating a severely strained trust towards the marketer. Yet, one comment proclaimed that "Honestly, the whole [ending] speculation and wait for the [Extended Cut] was some of my most exciting moments on any forum!," which suggests that for some the coping process itself was a period of novel communality (Lyons et al., 1998).

DISCUSSION

This study fills an important theoretical gap by bridging together studies of consumer coping and brand community studies by offering an emic account of a brand community coping process. This answers the call made by Russell and Schau (2014) for more research both on the role of sociality within trajectories of brand relationship as well as how collective responses to turning points in brand relationships are organized through social media. Our study is consistent with Lyons et al.'s (1998) framework of communal coping, but highlights key differences brought by the brand community context.

Is the brand community coping process effective in overturning a transgression and bringing comfort to community members? Here, the verdict is mixed. On one hand, the pressure and visibility that the community generated did put enough pressure on the marketer to the point that they had to address the issue. From this view, this study answers the call by Muñiz and Schau (2007) on how consumer-generated content an act as a vehicle for change (see also Rumbo, 2002; Carducci, 2006). Especially early in the process the transgression also emerged as a beneficial central challenge that helped the community grow and become more unified (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). But a lot of these benefits dissipated as the community's fragmentation in the later stages because members' status-building ambitions hindered organizing collective endeavors and caused significant emotional distress (Kozinets, 2002).

We would tentatively posit that cohesive brand communities whose orienting purpose is more geared towards problem solving (like proper brand usage) and long-term engagement are better equipped for communal coping than tribal brand communities where engagement is more fleeting and "fun" (e.g., Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Muñiz & Schau, 2005). Also, cohesive brand communities are usually more aware of member hierarchy and particularly the different skills of their members and can thus better determine coping roles (Lyons et al., 1998). We would also suggest that brand communities that have integrated a lot of different co-creative practices into their fold will do better at coping, as they can potentially repurpose these different practices to support coping endeavors (Schau et al., 2009). More importantly, this study shows how practices developed during the coping process can be integrated into the community beyond the transgression and potentially used to build a stronger community (Lyons et al., 1998). Indeed, some of the co-created responses to the transgression are still going on, well past the actual coping process itself. However, we

also posit that within a digital and co-creative context, harmful status-building efforts through competing via content production are likely to be more pervasive. This is in turn is counter to Muñiz and Schau's (2007) study that argued that co-created artifacts are likely work as "content for consensus" that keep dissenting members in check and strengthen the community.

This study also supports Ward and Ostrom's (2006) warning that for all their benefits, passionate brand communities pose significant risks for marketers. A strong brand community engaging in co-creation will be greatly beneficial when brand relationship is running smoothly (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Schau et al., 2009). But in the case of a transgression the community can and will weaponize its co-creative practices to harm the marketer (Muñiz & Schau, 2007). If the transgression is allowed to simmer long enough, different co-created responses can snowball into doppelganger brand images (Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). Furthermore, the community can also develop a permanent "habit" of becoming more confrontational towards the marketer for the sheer newly found enjoyment of it (Muñiz & Schau, 2005).

Our findings to a large degree concur with Schmalz and Orth (2012) who showed that when a transgression is severe enough, even a strong brand will not shield the company from backlash. However, consumers will not be looking at the marketer to blame, as particularly within the exploration stage of coping the community displayed nuanced readings of the transgression, even assigning blame on marketplace dynamics and other consumers (Aaker et al., 2004; Wright et al., 2013). This study also somewhat problematizes the view that being able to immediately vent on one's emotions publicly will initially heighten the feeling of negative emotions but in the long run will lead to a greater likelihood of acceptance or turning the negative moods to positive (cf. Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2011). In our view, a community can potentially enter a cycle of increasing negativity that can eventually lead to communal disintegration and eventually rumination. All in all, this study further underlines the importance of a transgression as a turning point in the brand relationship, as it can thoroughly renegotiate the purpose and practices of a community (Russell & Schau, 2014).

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CONSUMING AUSTERITY: VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

Andrea Prothero and Pierre McDonagh

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *This paper adopts a photo-essay approach in examining the Austerity Project within the Republic of Ireland, and considers the intersection between consumer culture and the austerity visuals we experience daily.*

Methodology/approach – *A visual, photo-essay method is adopted. Visual images taken in urban and rural parts of Ireland – under the key themes of ghost housing estates, failed commercial property developments, failed business, and art representations are explored.*

Findings – *The visual representations and subsequent consumption activities of the authors illustrate how austerity has become a complex act of production and consumption, and the authors consider how these various representations play a role in creating austerity as a state of mind amongst consumers, and the subsequent impact this has on consumption practices, consumer experiences, ideals and identities.*

Originality/value – *This paper adopts an under-represented research methodology (a photo-essay) to explore the Austerity Project and its intersections with consumer culture.*

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Keywords: Austerity; Consumer Culture Theory (CCT); photo-essay; visual representation

Transcript of Image 16 [xxx = illegible]

Class is only a division when one

Is subdued to accept it. A mere

Transcript of meaningless self

Preservation. A mere moment of chaos

Belief in ridicules is senseless:

Mere [xxx] of ignorance and

Flesh [xxx] [xxx] educated. A

Soulless mirroir image of mass

Destruction. Capsizes the more

You accept it. A hypocritical pack

Of fools really. A mere pack

The last ones:

Class. What is it?

Division. When did it arrive?

Segregation. Why does it still exist?

INTRODUCTION

Austerity: (1) sternness or severity of manner or attitude and (2) difficult economic conditions created by government measures to reduce public expenditure (Oxford Dictionary).

> Just as the Irish suffered a bad bout of irrational exuberance in the boom years, they have now been overcome by excessive pessimism. (The Economist, 2011)

The global financial crisis began to materialise in 2007 with the collapse of Icelandic banks, and quickly spread to the Eurozone and the US – large financial institutions, such as Lehmann Brothers in the US were liquidated, and other banks needed significant bailouts from their governments. As

well as the financial costs of austerity there are other impacts too. There have been increases in the number of suicides (Stuckler & Basu, 2013), and domestic violence against women has increased (O'Connor, 2014). Within Ireland there was an unprecedented €67.5 billion bailout for the country from the so-called Troika – the EU, ECB, and the IMF. The recession is now into its eight year and signs of recovery have stopped and started, although there is cautious optimism for 2014. A number of books have been written on the subject of austerity, both globally (Boyer, 2012; Bramall, 2013; Callan et al., 2011; Clarke & Newman, 2012; Drudy & Collins, 2011; Giger & Nelson, 2011; Karanikolos et al., 2013; Krugman, 2012; Perotti, 2012), and specifically about Ireland (Carswell, 2011; McWilliams, 2010; O'Toole, 2009; Ross, 2009), and newspapers/periodicals publish stories on a daily basis (e.g. Allen, 2009; Lewis, 2011; O'Toole, 2014). In 2007, Ireland's government had a significant GDP surplus, but three years later was having to accept a bailout from the Troika, both to bail out the banks and address the significant sovereign debt acquired since 2007. 2013 saw the eighth austerity budget in a row (The Economist, 2013), and Ireland is second only to Greece in terms of its austerity measures (Cahill, 2012). The collapse of the Irish economy is particularly interesting from a CCT perspective, because we witnessed a move from the historical epoch of the Celtic Tiger in 1995–2007, where consumption was at an unprecedented high, to that of the Austerity epoch which began in 2007, and which had significant impact on the consumption experiences and practices of Irish citizens.

Economic austerity has led to a significant reduction in the income of large numbers of the Irish population. Public sector employees, for instance, have witnessed two pay cuts since 2008, as well as the introduction of a public sector pension levy, and other direct and indirect economic measures. Many banks have raised variable mortgage rates, despite reductions in interest rates by the European Central Bank. There have been various protests by Irish citizens, but no major forms of industrial action. News stories most read by Irish Times readers, Ireland's main broadsheet newspaper, in 2013 focused on the bank bailout, property prices and the economy (O'Brien, 2013). Austerity then is everywhere.

The Austerity Project within Ireland has been produced via governments (both nationally and internationally) and via various government policies – including public sector cutbacks, salary reductions, etc., via the construction sector, via the banking sector, via the media, and indeed via society, and it is within this context that we consider what impact this has had on Irish consumers. While Ireland exited the EU/IMF bailout on 15 December 2013,

the first country to exit the bailout programme, austerity still continues, and no-one is expecting a sudden return to the boom Celtic Tiger years. While unemployment fell in 2013, for instance, it is still incredibly high, at 12.8% (O'Toole, 2014). There are suggestions that the Austerity Project will not work, both globally, and within Ireland, that the IMF got its numbers wrong, where tax increases alongside spending cuts cost the economy more than it expected (Cahill, 2012). As David Begg of the Irish Confederation of Trades Unions stressed – 'We were the poster child for globalisation. Now we are the poster child for austerity' (in Elliott, 2011).

How then do Irish consumers cope with austerity? What's it like moving from a period of sustained economic growth to a period of major economic downturn almost overnight? Using an Elias-inspired (1991) approach Dolan (2009) considered how Irish consumers moved from a collective, 'we' to an individualistic, 'I' approach in their consumption practices during the period 1900–1980, and there is evidence that this 'I' approach continued into the Celtic Tiger era of 1995–2007. Rather than focus on the consumer as either hero or dupe (Slater, 1997) Dolan (2009) suggests we should build on the work of Trentmann (2006) and consider the impact the socio-historic context has on consumer subjectivity. Given the historical importance of both the Celtic Tiger and the current Age of Austerity and their links with consumption, research, which further explores the socio-historic context, is warranted.

METHOD

As Dolan (2002) reminds us '[i]ndividual acts of consumption are not in opposition to, and prior to, macro structures and processes; they *are* macro processes at work', (p. 171). For this project we are interested in how our viewing of the macro processes at work influence consumption experiences, practices and ideals. Arnould and Thompson (2005) discuss how Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) explores the 'dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings' (p. 868), here we explore how visual representations of Ireland's Austerity Project, impact the construction of consumer identities and consumption practices. As mentioned in the introduction, we are interested in exploring the values and morals surrounding consumption, and how socio-historic factors impact these (Dolan, 2009).

The authors engaged in capturing a series of photographs that represented austerity to them, between October 2013 and January 2014. Photographs were taken in Dublin city centre; Dundalk, and the Cooley Peninsula (both in the North-East Leinster region of Ireland), thus covering urban (city and large town) and rural settings. We adopt a visual research methods, photo-essay approach, by focusing on images that were specifically 'made' for this project (Rose, 2011) – that is images we experience in our everyday lives while commuting to work, driving our children to school, running, cycling and taking walks in the countryside, and which we subsequently captured and 'made' via photograph taking. While photographic research methods have become more popular in recent years (Rose, 2011) they are still relatively scant in CCT work. Building on the Subjective Personal Introspective method (SPI) of Holbrook (1986, 1995) and others (Gould, 1995; Shankar, 2000) the authors utilise SPI to 'produce an essay [in our case a photo essay] that sheds some light on some aspect of humanity as reflected in the everyday life of the consumer in general and the author in particular' (Holbrook, 2005, p. 45). In this case we focus on austerity.

The authors are both public sector employees in Ireland, and have experienced a significant reduction in their net income since 2008 (although it should be noted that their combined earnings are at the higher end of income levels in Ireland). The paper explores their interpretations of austerity from a particular perspective. While our disposable income has been reduced considerably the authors are not in the same position of many others who have significant debt, are in mortgage arrears, have lost (or are in the process of losing) their home, or have become unemployed. Our analysis is not meant to be representative of the wider population, but moreover offer an insight into how visual images, which represent (to us) the institutional production of austerity, impact our (and our families) consumer experiences, ideals, identities and consumption practices.

CONSUMING AUSTERITY – VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

During the course of our everyday lives Irish consumers are exposed to visual representations of the collapse of the economy and the government's Austerity Project. These representations take many forms, and four

examples explored here are – ghost housing estates, failed commercial property developments, failed businesses, and art forms depicting austerity. These capture the representations from the authors' perspectives and are examples of our everyday experiences. At a time when there has been a call for photography to depict the global recession (Weiner, 2013) this project is timely, particularly as Weiner notes the important role photography played in previous depictions of recessions. Visual images are an excellent way of depicting the here and now and provide illustrations of socio-historical forces at work.

Ghost Estates

During the Celtic Tiger years there was a huge expansion of housing developments across the country, in both urban and rural areas; the collapse of the economy had significant impact on the housing sector, with many developers, construction and building companies going out of business. The result being a huge number, of what have been labelled 'ghost estates' throughout the country. Developments that were in various stages of completion were simply abandoned; some have no residents at all (e.g. Image 3), while others have residents living in a partially complete development (e.g. Images 1, 2, 4).

Image 1. Ghost Estate 1, Carlingford, Co Louth.

Image 2. Ghost Estate 1, Carlingford, County Louth.

Image 3. Ghost Estate 2, Carlingford, County Louth.

Failed Commercial Property Developments

As well as ghost estates, there are examples of failed commercial property developments throughout the country, examples from the North Wall Quay area of Dublin's city centre are illustrated below. The empty shell

Image 4. Ghost Estate 3, Carlingford, Co Louth.

building shown in Images 5–7 was once meant to be the new home of Ireland's, now infamous, Anglo Irish Bank, and was sold by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) (the agency set up by the Irish government in 2009 to manage the failed development loans in the property market) to Ireland's Central Bank in 2012. As the images show no development of the site has taken place since the purchase in 2012, and given the building's association with Anglo Irish Bank, it has become an iconic representation of the financial crisis and the cataclysmic collapse of the property market. To the left of the building in Image 5 one can also view the Samuel Beckett Bridge, a new bridge designed by famous architect Santiago Calatrave, and officially opened in 2009 – the bridge is a representation of one of the successes of the Celtic Tiger years, and the juxtaposition of both structures in the image is worthy of mention. In the background of the image one can see the Irish Financial Services Centre, and not in the image but on the opposite side of the river Liffey are examples of successful commercial developments. The juxtaposition of both the success and failure of the Celtic Tiger years are evident in this image.

During the time of taking the photographs the authors noted a number of abandoned buildings (both private family residences and business premises) from previous decades, so it seems the abandonment of dwellings is not a new phenomenon in Ireland – although the older illustrations had previously been lived in or utilised for various commercial endeavours. Examples of abandoned homes, again within the Cooley Peninsula are

Image 5. North Wall Quay, Dublin City Centre.

Image 6. North Wall Quay, Dublin City Centre.

provided below. It is worth noting that the ghost estates and the abandoned homes are all within a 10 km radius of each other (Images 8 and 9).

Failed Businesses

As well as the ghost estates and failed business developments there are significant numbers of business which have been liquated, including hotels,

Image 7. Prime Development Site (Spencer Dock), North Wall Quay, Dublin City Centre.

Image 8. Abandoned Dwelling, Lordship, Co Louth.

retail stores, restaurants and public houses, and as, with the ghost estates, many have simply been abandoned (Images 10–14).

Art and Communications

As well as seeing examples of austerity representations via buildings, homes and businesses collapsing there are visual examples by artists, which focus on the recession and austerity, and businesses have utilised the recession in

Image 9. Abandoned Dwelling, Giles' Quay, Co Louth.

Image 10. Public House, Carlingford, County Louth.

their communications strategies. The Irish Trade Union, SIPTU, utilised the entire outside of its headquarters, situated in the centre of Dublin, with artwork depicting the historical role of the union in protecting workers. As with Image 5 above the juxtaposition of austerity images with remembrances of the Celtic Tiger era are evident in this image, with Dublin's Millennium Spire, completed in 2003, clearly visible to the left of the

Image 11. Filling Station, Dundalk, Co Louth.

Image 12. Toy Store, Dundalk, Co Louth.

SIPTU building. Graffiti across the country has also provided various illustrations of the austerity project (Images 15 and 16).

Two examples of communication representations are shown in Images 17 and 18. Image 17 shows a humorous take on the banking crisis taken by Oxfam on one of its clothing banks, and Image 18 another humorous take by a local restaurant.

What the images show is the extent to which Irish citizens experience the Austerity Project in their everyday lives. Even those citizens who have not been exposed financially would find it hard to not experience austerity images. Going about our daily lives we experience visual representations of the collapse of the economy, in both rural and urban areas, and these representations, coupled with other macro, meso and micro forces shape our consumer experiences, ideals, identities and consumption practices. The

Image 13. Appliances Shop, Dundalk, Co Louth.

Image 14. Empty Car Park of Liquidated Supermarket, Dundalk, Co Louth.

visual images illustrate how the economy has failed and how austerity is produced by wider institutional forces – be they in the form of empty housing estates that should never have been built and have been subsequently abandoned by bankrupt developers, and which the Irish government has failed to tackle; or in the form of business developments on either a small (closing down of a pub) or grand scale (large scale collapse of prime development site in central Dublin). Politics loom large in our thoughts

Image 15. SIPTU Trade Union, Dublin City Centre.

Image 16. Graffiti, North Wall Quay, Dublin City Centre.

about these representations, and as Brewer and Trentmann (2006) remind us politics also plays a role in the shaping of our consumer values, practices and identities. We can see both 'shaming' and 'blaming'. The shame of failure of the banking institutions, the blaming by people of leaders in the economy, as well as the shame of having engaged in excess consumption, being seduced by an 'I' economy and having forgotten the 'We' sense of

Image 17. Oxfam Clothing Bank.

community. Some mention is also made of austerity being a good thing as Ireland had lost its sense of community.

As the authors experience these images going about their everyday lives it reminds them that austerity is everywhere, and impacts their consumer experiences and practices. While austerity is not a new thing historically speaking, and Ireland has experienced it both in its recent and more distant past, it is a new experience for many Irish citizens. Another wave of Irish emigration has begun with a brain drain and talk of yet another a lost generation. It is also the first Austerity Project that follows a significant period of economic growth and 'boom' times.

Consequently, the authors engage in 'austere consumption', because that's what the times demand – for us, this involves a reduction in

Image 18. Local Restaurant Advertising.

spending on non-essential items – experiences including travel; clothes and accessories; books; music (both CD and digital); attending gigs, the cinema, and eating out are all curbed; and we generally cut back on buying goods and experiences, particularly at Christmastime. We stop consuming the news – particularly Irish news, and reading generally about austerity; hopelessness, indebtedness and despair are not uplifting news items. We feel guilty when we fall off the 'austere' bandwagon (which includes excessive purchase of takeaway coffee for one of the authors and shoes for the other!), and or enjoy a luxury (e.g. a holiday), which we know others cannot afford. Many of our actions have been depicted in two other austerity papers in Ireland and Spain (Alonson, Rodgríguez, & Rojo, 2014; Keating, Prothero, & Claudy, 2013). Our consumer ideals are affected and we re-evaluate what role consumption plays in our own and others' identities, all

the while remembering the ‘consumer’ is only one part of the person (Dolan, 2009). As neither author is particularly oriented towards excessive purchase of material goods our own ideals have not changed much, but we practice these ideals more than we did when disposable income levels were greater than they currently are. It fuels anger in terms of how we feel governments have handled the recession, from a competency based view of a political elite, and in particular, its implementation of severe austerity measures which fall hardest on those who suffer the most; but also feelings of guilt – in terms of what role did we play, and how lucky we are in comparison to others. Our actions are influenced by the significant drop in our disposable income (but again it is important to stress, we are in the highest earning band in the country, and our experiences should be interpreted with this factor in mind), but also by the daily reminders, illustrated in the four categories above, of austerity. When one of the authors, for instance, finds herself about to purchase something which she really does not need, two images come to mind, that of the failed Anglo Irish Bank building seen in Images 5–7, which she sees every time she travels to work, and the ghost housing estate seen in Images 1 and 2, which she sees regularly on one of her running routes. Thus, the production of austerity by various institutions – governments, banks, developers, businesses; indeed society generally, is visually noticeable to us everyday, and these visual reminders, along with a decrease in our disposable income, and other impacts such as media representations and mass-mediated marketing communications, have changed the way we engage with consumption. Our consumer actions are not only influenced by the marketplace and various cultural meanings produced and consumed therein, but also by the visual reminders, in many guises, which we experience daily, and which profoundly affect our consumer actions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In their seminal CCT piece in 2005 Arnould and Thompson emphasise that ‘consumer culture theorists reveal the ways in which capitalist cultural production systems invite consumers to covet certain identity and lifestyle ideals’ (p. 873) while calling for research which considers ‘the moral constitution of consumption and the nature of moral dilemmas and challenges that the commercialisation of everyday life, including its most intimate moments, pose for consumers’ (p. 876). The global economic crisis has

though turned the notions of what consumer ideals are or should be on its head and these are in a state of flux, particularly in Ireland.

Equally the moral dilemmas surrounding the commercialisation of everyday life are now being considered at a global, macro level – as we question the ideals of neo-liberal capitalism. Bramall (2013) has identified the contradictions within the Austerity Project where she highlights 'the age of austerity creates an opportunity to communicate anti-consumerist ideas, but at the same time, increased consumption is presented as the only realistic solution to economic problems' (p. 10). While the definition of austerity at the beginning of this paper highlights its economic element it is evident that such policies also have an 'ideological dimension' (Bramall, 2013), and as a central component of capitalism, consumption's ideology is thus called into question. And as Bramall (2013) remind us, research should focus on both the cultural and economic aspects of austerity.

This paper focuses on consumer culture in particular. For this paper we have focused on the visual representations of Ireland's Austerity Project and considered how these impact consumer experiences, ideals and consumption practices, through the lens of the two authors. The visual representations illustrate how austerity has become a complex act of production and consumption, and considers how these various representations play a role in creating austerity as a state of mind. In other words, being both surrounded by austerity (in terms of visual representations) and impacted by it (in terms of pay cuts, increased taxes etc.), influences how we engage in consumption practices, define our consumer identity and our consumer ideals change. Future research, which considers how these representations, and the creation and manufacture of austerity by institutions impact at an individual, 'austerity consumer' level, is warranted (cf. Alímen & Bayraktaroglu, 2011; Alonson, Rodgríguez, & Rojo, 2014; Faganel, 2011; Keating et al., 2013); as is future research which examines wider analysis of the visual representations discussed here.

While this paper has shown a visual representation of the everyday reminders of austerity, as experienced by the authors, and briefly describes this impact on their consumer activities, future research, which explores the viewpoints of other consumers, is also warranted – what are others' viewpoints of the images presented here? How people engage in a consumer culture focusing on the themes of community, pleasure, denial, shame, embarrassment, anger, guilt, resistance and blame can all be further explored. What new consumption activities are taking place – gleaning behaviour at an aggregate, new forms of recycled fashion or a reawakening of growing your own foods – and are these examples of positive outcomes

of the Austerity Project? How does what's happening now compare with historical accounts of previous austere times? Public perceptions of resilience during these times can be explored. What images would others' produce to define austerity to them? How have others' consumption activities changed as a result of the global recession? Have consumer ideals changed? Do manifestations of austerity in the everyday (via ghost estates for instance) have an impact on others' consumption activities? Connecting, both to the wisdom of the previous Irish diaspora and those who remained behind, seems poignantly relevant here. The ranks of the diaspora are swollen again by another generation of Irish youth. A quest for a better quality of life than that faced by remaining in Ireland to pay increased taxes for the mistakes of their parents' generation offers a rich vein for CCT work.

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MONEY TALKS: REPRODUCING DEPRIVATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN POVERTY THROUGH DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

Henna Syrjälä, Hanna Leipämaa-Leskinen and Pirjo Laaksonen

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *This paper examines in what ways cultural representations of money reveal deprivation and empowerment in poverty.*

Methodology/approach – *The study draws on Finnish poor consumers' narratives of their daily lives to identify the discursive practices involved in money talk. Poverty is seen as a frame in which the tacit cultural knowledge of money and the ways of enacting discursive practices are sustained and produced.*

Findings – *The research constructs a theoretical illustration of consumer empowerment and deprivation in poverty, which is based on four discursive practices: Moneyless is powerless, Capricious money, Wrestling with*

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money, and Happiness cannot be bought with money. The illustration shows the dynamic evolution of empowerment and deprivation as they grow from and vary within the discursive practices.

Social implications and value – *The study highlights the practical carrying out of life in poverty, which does not emerge only as deprived or as empowered, but instead involves a tension between them.*

Keywords: Poverty; discursive practices; money; deprivation; empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there was a lively discussion in Finnish social media about the question of 'who can be defined as a poor person?' The debate was sparked when a single father of two children wrote an autobiographical book about his everyday life in poverty. He makes between 1800 and 2000 euros a month, owns a used iPhone, and lives in a two-bedroom flat; however, he cannot always pay the rent on time or afford to spend money on school field trips for his children. This raised questions about what the poor are entitled to own and how they should consume. Some commenters in the social media debate took a hard-line stance, claiming that anyone who earns nearly 2000 euros per month cannot be poor. Money and the exact amount of it seemed to be a decent and publicly acceptable way to measure and value experiences of poverty.

This paper examines in what ways the cultural representations of money can reveal deprivation and empowerment in poor circumstances. We lean on Blocker et al. (2012), who suggest two focal concepts for studying poverty, namely felt deprivation and power. These concepts highlight how the poor are forced to struggle with the lack of money and other resources, but also engage in many empowered tactics and practices when coping with poverty. We aim to give a voice to the poor themselves in order to grasp their sharp, highly critical and ironic talk about money in a way that enables us to crystallize the types of deprivation and empowerment in poverty. Instead of focusing on the symbolic meanings of money in general, we investigate Finnish poor consumers' doings and sayings related to money, as for the poor, the unavoidable existence, or rather inexistence, of money is a tangible fact of life that cannot be escaped. In this manner, we also contribute to discussions that call for studying how money itself

is culturally manufactured and consumed (Langley, 2013; Ruckenstein, 2010).

Furthermore, the current study approaches poor circumstances through culturally shared and constructed discursive practices (Reckwitz, 2002), in contrast to the vast body of prior consumer research on poverty that has focused on gaining phenomenological understanding of poor consumers' daily struggles (e.g. Hamilton, 2009a; Hamilton & Catterall, 2005; Hill, 2003). As discursive practices are viewed as social reproductions of poor consumers' everyday living, poverty creates frames in which the tacit cultural knowledge of money and the ways of enacting discursive practices are sustained and produced. Simultaneously, these discursive practices shape and constrain poor consumers' consumption. Thus, the doings and sayings of people are addressed in addition to the meanings carried by objects (Halkier & Jensen, 2011; Warde, 2005).

This paper is organized as follows. First, we consider the interfaces between deprivation and empowerment in the context of poverty. Then, we discuss prior research on money, focusing particularly on cultural representations of money. Next, we elaborate on discursive practices as a theoretical and methodological choice along with the data and the conduct of analysis. The findings reveal four discursive practices: Moneyless is powerless, Capricious money, Wrestling with money and Happiness cannot be bought with money. This paper concludes with a theoretical illustration showing how empowerment and deprivation evolve dynamically within the discursive practices of money in poverty. In this manner, the discursive practices of money talk give us novel lenses to study the practical carrying out of life in poverty, which does not emerge only as deprived or as empowered, but instead involves a tension between them.

POVERTY AND THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN DEPRIVATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Next, we discuss the daily juggling by drawing on sociological writings and also on individual consumer-centred views on poor consumers' daily struggles and empowering coping strategies when experiencing social stigmatization as well as economic, material and social hardship.

To start with, in welfare societies such as Finland, poverty is relative, putting emphasis on social survival and overall possibilities to enjoy life (Townsend, 1979). Hence, poverty is more than a material condition;

it also holds psychological and social dimensions that are understood in relation to a wider context (Bauman, 2005). The relative view on poverty calls for studying social participation, inclusion and exclusion, citizenship and empowerment (MacPherson & Silburn, 1998). Recently, Blocker et al. (2012) proposed *felt deprivation* and *power* as focal concepts through which poverty can be understood. We take these two concepts as starting points in our conceptual discussion to analyse the cultural construction of poverty.

First, deprivation stems from the marginalized position of the poor in the markets. Felt deprivation brings forward 'the beliefs, emotions and experiences that arise when individuals see themselves as unable to fulfil the consumption needs of a minimally decent life' (Blocker et al., 2012, p. 2). The poor are described as hidden consumers (Ekström & Hjort, 2009) who are left behind by the consumer culture (Hamilton, 2009a). Poor consumers are in many ways constrained in terms of their consumption opportunities and are often forced to make dreadful consumption-related trade-offs (Narayan, 2002). To illustrate, Hamilton (2012) describes how the poor are unable to continually reconstruct their consumer identities, unlike their more affluent fellow citizens.

Stigmatization and social exclusion related to deprivation have been thoroughly discussed in prior research, for instance in the case of Swedish school children (Fernqvist, 2013), Irish low-income families (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006) and homeless people in the United States (e.g. Hill & Stamey, 1990). Bauman (2005) also highlights the stigmatization of poverty, discussing the link between poverty and work through the concept of flawed consumers. Poor consumers are viewed as being flawed, because they are unable to do their share by working and being profitable resources. Similarly, Warde (1994) distinguishes people with high levels of cultural capital and those with few resources, arguing that freedom of choice is not as self-evident as often assumed.

The second focal concept, power, helps us to understand how 'negative effects on poverty can be transformed' (Blocker et al., 2012, p. 3). Although poverty is often considered to involve a lack of power, it has been found that poor consumers also develop power tactics and thus become empowered actors in the markets (Hamilton, 2012). It seems that the way in which deprivation is understood and constructed in social networks plays a key role with regard to empowerment, as one of the main conclusions of the prior research is that poor people seek to claim their share of societal wealth (Hill, 2002) and want to reinforce their image of themselves as self-sufficient individuals (Hill & Stamey, 1990). However,

the support of social networks is found to be important and the poor often hold strong social capital, as in the case of Appalachian communities (Lee, Ozanne, & Hill, 1991). In addition, poor consumers develop varied coping strategies (Hamilton, 2012). Emotional coping strategies in particular show that the poor are able to resist the pressures of consumer-oriented society by engaging in simple living; this implies that they value a budget-conscious lifestyle. By doing so, the poor may engage in innovative and creative product and service use (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005) and even in actions that try to mask poverty in an attempt to hide it from outsiders (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006).

Most of these prior studies concentrate on studying the individual experiences of poor consumers. Our study takes the view that, even if discursive practices are manifested in individual performances, they are always embedded in cultural structures (Halkier, Katz-Gerro, & Martens, 2011), and therefore the individual poor consumer is viewed as a carrier of practices and the unit of analysis is the discursive practice. Further, we analyse how the ways of consuming are produced socially as they are understood as continuous, dynamic and relational accomplishments (Halkier & Jensen, 2011, pp. 105−107). Money talk gives us novel lenses through which this constant construction and shaping of poverty and empowerment can be elaborated. Thus, in the following section we focus on how notions of money become meaningful in different sociocultural settings.

MONEY AS A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT

Interestingly, money, its cultural meanings and daily uses have received only little attention in cultural consumer research. Research on consumer credit has likewise been neglected, as Langley (2013, pp. 2−3) points out; he also argues that the production and reproduction of money and credit are largely overlooked in sociological literatures, too. The emphasis has been on investigating the symbolic meanings of money in a consumer society instead of examining how credit or money itself is culturally manufactured and consumed.

The roots for exploring the cultural representations of money lie, for example, in Bloch and Parry's (1989) seminal study 'Money and the Morality of Exchange'. They state that money is often described as 'the root of all evil' and seen as a central actor in our consumption culture, having the ability to disrupt social and economic relations. However, they

end up suggesting that money should not be seen as holding *inherent* power to alter social relations; attention should be directed towards those *social world views that give rise to particular representations of money*.

The social and cultural meanings of money have been explored by anthropologists and ethnographers, but have also attracted interest in the field of economics. For instance, Wennerlind (2001, p. 557) argues that there is a need for insights on certain salient features of money and its use, namely money's cultural, political and social context and content. Similarly, Dyer (1989) emphasized the semiotic view on money, arguing that money serves as a primary vehicle in a pecuniary culture through which meanings are constructed. To date, a small number of cultural consumer studies have examined the significance of money in different moral and social contexts, such as children's talk about money (Ruckenstein, 2010), working class women and gambling (Casey, 2003), the Hindu worldview and investment patterns (Jain & Joy, 1997), and shopping in post-Soviet consumer culture (Keller, 2005).

In this paper, we extend the view presented by Bloch and Parry (1989) on money's cultural meanings. We argue that by studying discursive practices of money talk it is possible to crystallize the cultural construction of poverty in consumer society in regards to not only the understandings of money but also to related uses and doings. Much like Ruckenstein (2010) has explored children's talk about money, the current study looks at how poor consumers talk about money and aims to find out what doings and sayings concerning money reveal about the modes of deprivation and empowerment in poor circumstances.

APPLYING THE DISCURSIVE PRACTICE APPROACH

In his seminal article, Reckwitz (2002) presents discursive practices as one type of practices among others. However, practice theorists are not unanimous in their views on the significance of talk. On the one hand, theorists such as Schatzki (2001) and Warde (2005) emphasize that practices only come alive when they are performed. On the other hand, others hold that practices can take several forms ranging from linguistic to social, material and sensual (Valtonen, 2013).

The discursive practice approach combines discourse analysis and practice theory, which means that even if discourses and talk are not regarded as omnipotent, as in discourse analysis, discursive practices make the world meaningful through talk and sign systems (Reckwitz, 2002). Thus, the

practices are 'talked into action' through discursive practices (Jaakkola, 2011). Discursive practices are actualized through the ways of talking and social interaction that construct everyday life; they are lived and part of the ongoing performativity of the social world.

In conclusion, discursive practices do not consist merely of communication or chains of signs, but also extend to bodily scripts, routinized mental actions (including pragmatic rules of language and choice of words), motivations and objects that are all interrelated. According to practice theory, language exists only in its routinized use, which means that in order for carriers of practice to understand objects (e.g. money) and to be able to act with these objects, the carriers of practice have to view certain meanings as routinized properties of certain objects (i.e. as 'signs') (Reckwitz, 2002). In this way, the analysis focuses on the conditions surrounding the practical carrying out of social life (Halkier et al., 2011).

DATA AND ANALYSIS

The current data were based on poverty narratives that were published in an anthology for which Finnish poor people wrote stories about their daily lives. The narratives were entries in a national writing competition held in 2006. The anthology is called *Everyday Experiences of Poverty* [free translation] and includes 77 short narratives, whose length varies between 2 and 10 pages, with a total of 348 pages of written text.

Usually, practice approaches use observational or multi-method data, but as we aimed to reveal discursive practices, textual data provides opportunities to discover linguistic variety in the ways of delineating the everyday performativity of practices. Furthermore, we follow Halkier's and Jensen's (2011, p. 109) view on social constructionist practice theory, in which it is argued that different types of qualitative data act as expressions of social action in that they are products of performing with and in relation to others (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). Thus, the narrative writers have access to a variety of symbolic resources and a multiplicity of societal and cultural discourses and performances that inevitably contribute to constructing the narratives. The narratives vividly showed poor consumers' daily doings and consumption in a way that enabled us to grasp the manners in which they actualize the discursive practices.

To contextualize the data and our findings, we discuss what it means to be poor in Finland. A commonly agreed measure to define poverty is an

income level that is less than 60% of the median income (in Finland EUR 14 741 in 2010). The official statistics show that in 2010 13.3% of the Finnish people could be defined as poor (Official Statistics of Finland, 2012). The Finnish social protection system includes various forms of financial supports and benefits, for example unemployment pension, disability allowance, child benefits and basic social assistance as a last-resort form of benefit (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2011). Thus, the authors acknowledge that being poor in a Nordic welfare economy like Finland is different than in most other European countries and it certainly differs from the situation in the developing countries.

The present data are based on the informants' subjective evaluations of their poverty and therefore the data do not represent an objectively representative view of poor people's lives in Finland, and thus we adopt a *relative perspective* on poverty (Townsend, 1979). Even if the informants did not necessarily starve (sometimes they did), they defined and experienced themselves as poor. Being poor in a welfare society can be even more socially excluding, as one is surrounded by a consumption-oriented culture and affluence (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005, 2006). Moreover, both our data and the official statistics show that the poor in Finland are not a homogeneous group (Official Statistics of Finland, 2012). Instead, their sociodemographic profiles, lifestyles and behaviours vary. For example, there is great structural variation behind the reasons for and length of poverty. It can result from bankruptcy or being unemployed, a pensioner, a low-income employee or a student; in addition, in the case of some poor families, poverty appeared to be inherited over several generations. Moreover, both families with many children and persons living alone can be poor.

The analysis started by identifying varied ways of talking about money, after which the analysis developed through iterative readings of data and theory. Instead of looking how individuals practiced money talk, we examined the ways of carrying out practices and the patterns in these enacted social processes (Halkier & Jensen, 2011, p. 113). Therefore, each of the types of discursive practices represents patterns across enactments of several participants rather than individuals as such. In this way, each participant may be a carrier of several practices.

More specifically, the data were analysed according to the anatomy of practices. Halkier and Jensen (2011, p. 114) describe the anatomy of practices as 'empirically applicable concepts within practice theory', which make it possible to distinguish discursive practices from each other. Here, we disassembled the types of practices through the three dimensions that each practice is assumed to have: understandings (knowledge and tacit cultural

templates), procedures (explicit performance rules) and engagements (emotional projects and purposes) (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009; Warde, 2005). By building the analysis of discursive practices upon this anatomy, it is possible to grasp discursive practices as practices, not as mere talk. Thus, for example, the analysis of procedures is not limited to scripts and rules of language but is interested in how the procedures participate in the construction of everyday life and lived practices through money talk.

Our analysis revealed four non-exclusive nexus of discursive practices of money talk: Moneyless is powerless, Capricious money, Wrestling with money, and Happiness cannot be bought with money. In the following sections, we discuss each of these discursive practices and their actualization in poor consumers' everyday living. The four types of practices show how empowerment and deprivation are intertwined in money talk.

MONEYLESS IS POWERLESS

The first discursive practice consists of ideological talk about the evils of money and sustains culturally shaped sayings about the power of money within these austere frames. Similar to Wennerlind (2001, p. 569) who argues that 'money is a discursive space in which power relations are acted out', the power of money seems to be tied to enactment of social relations:

> Money brings responsibility – but also seems to make people forget about the suffering of the poor and one's own responsibility to help others. Of course, it's easy to be poor and complain; it's difficult to be the king and do the right thing. People too often trust in money, which is the true monarch in today's society. We forget that money has no morality – it doesn't bear responsibility for citizens. If it so happens that I get rich out of the blue, I don't want to lose my soul.

As Bloch and Parry (1989) claim, in Western ideology money has the power to disrupt and destroy social relations. Accordingly, the *procedural* rules of this discursive practice imply that money appears to be something that is simply wrong and immoral, which is actualized in sayings like 'money stinks' and 'money eats your soul'. Ruckenstein (2010, p. 398) labels this the transforming power of money, referring to the ideology according to which the one who has money has the power. The following quotes illustrate these power structures of money: 'money brings you to your knees', 'money is king' and 'money is its own boss'.

Further, the *understandings* are embedded in talk about how everything depends on money (but should not). Indeed, money is thought to be

'everything' – not only material wealth and objects of consumption, but also a sign of superiority as a human being. The following quote shows how moneyless carriers of practice are actualized as powerless and worthless.

> The amount of possessions and money is used as a yardstick of personal worth – in this culture, we're raised to value material goods, the power of money and wealth.

Engagement in this type of a discursive practice is related to the juxtaposition of anxiety, submission, inferiority as well as contempt and criticism, paralleling Bloch and Parry's (1989) conclusion that money is evil. The carriers of this discursive practice do not have power (money) to change that state of being, as money holds everybody on a leash:

> Because modern society revolves around money, the lack of money might be the most stressful factor in human life: without money, you don't have much else, either.

CAPRICIOUS MONEY

In this second discursive practice, money appears unmanageable and capricious. Money is an element – or even an actor – that cannot be governed; it goes its own mercurial ways and changes paths unpredictably. The carriers of the practice have little control over its movements.

The *procedures* of this discursive practice revolve around talk about how there is nothing lasting about money, that it changes owners and its value. These *understandings* are showcased in the sharing of culturally sustained metaphors of money such as 'throwing money down the well' and 'money doesn't grow on trees'. When money suddenly changes hands, its new owners are usually somebody else than the carriers of this practice. Thus, money talk is tied to an *understanding* about how money moves in society following a long-term cycle of exchange that is neither fair nor predictable (Bloch & Parry, 1989). This capriciousness of money is also evident in its fluctuating value, which emerges in sayings that wonder about 'the real value of money', how much is 'pocket money', and dreams about 'wheelbarrows full of cash'.

Sarcastic *engagement* penetrates this type of discursive practice as money talk among the poor is leavened with humour, showing how empowerment in this discursive practice is limited to emotional coping (Hamilton & Catterall, 2008). There is no way to change austere circumstances, only the ways of responding to it: 'As children, we learned that money doesn't grow on trees. We stretched our pennies so much, we turned them into wire!'

Still, criticisms and confusion about the changing value of money shine through in quotes like this: 'Prices rise every year, but we still have to get by with the same amount'. Similarly, one of our writers discusses the enactment in everyday living of how much is *just enough* money.

> Some wise person has said that you should have just enough money – not too much or too little. If you have too much, you think about it all the time. That's also true when you don't have enough. When you have a lot, you worry about it, afraid that you'll lose it. When you have too little, you have to keep counting pennies. If you have just enough, you don't have to think about it all the time – and thus it doesn't control your life too much.

WRESTLING WITH MONEY

Third, money, or being deprived of it, becomes a source of many mundane struggles. In this discursive practice money is talked about in a flat way, maybe mentioned only as an aside, as its (non)existence constructs as unavoidable.

This discursive practice describes how, in the frames of poverty, there is not (enough) money or there is only enough money for the most necessary quotidian consumption: 'The basic unemployment allowance from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland isn't enough for anything extra – it barely covers the essentials, if that', one of our writers states. However, the *procedures* are embedded in casual, tangible and factual calculations of the sufficiency of money based on *understandings* of what can and cannot be achieved with a certain amount of money: 'Life meant balancing budgets all the time'. Similar to prior research, consumption emerges as a reason for anxiety and as a burden rather than a pleasure (Ekström & Hjort, 2009a; Hamilton, 2009b; Hill, 2003). Next, one of the poor consumers as a carrier of this practice showcases the mundane actualization of what it is like to live on the 'basic unemployment allowance'.

> Living on a basic unemployment allowance is not a life worthy of a human being. If you envy those on the dole, try it. One month doesn't give you a good idea. To get some idea of what it's like, live on the allowance for at least half a year, and without the certainty that it will end. When you've been dependent on it for years, only then can you understand what it's about. Welfare tourism truly doesn't give you a real idea of what it's like. I don't go to restaurants or the movies. I have barely enough money for food and keeping myself clean.

The sufficiency of money was often related to specific everyday consumption objects like 'I no longer even have a TV because I can't afford

the licence'. Money was tied to a certain use; it comes from a certain source or is enough only for a certain period, for example: 'spending money', 'food money' and 'monthly money'. Thus, the *understandings* revolve around how external reasons and actors channel the everyday spending and receiving of money, which shows how the other social practices are intertwined with this discursive practice. The performance of this discursive practice, for instance the spending of money, is subject to great restrictions, leaving the carrier of the practice in a role in which the power is limited to managing – and wrestling with – everyday life using calculations and practical coping skills (Hamilton, 2012).

Engagements in this discursive practice were incorporated in modesty, mundane realism and acceptance that this is the way things are, as one of our writers shows: 'I didn't have money, but students never do'. The engagements were also entangled with worry and upset. The following excerpt highlights these engagements of mundane deprivation of money.

> I've lived alone with my son for seven months now. It's been a really difficult time, because I have to pay all the bills on my own. I live in an apartment building in Turku and have to pay rent and electricity bills. My housing allowance helps a bit, but the deductible is quite large, and there's nothing left over from my unemployment allowance. My son is already six years old and will start going to preschool in the autumn. He's old enough that he knows to ask for something when he wants it. It's really difficult to explain to him that mommy never has money to buy anything.

HAPPINESS CANNOT BE BOUGHT WITH MONEY

Compared to the discursive practices presented above, here the poor appear as empowered and strong carriers of practice. The *procedures* of this discursive practice are shown in quotes like 'money's not the most important thing in life'; instead, family, friends and health are more significant. Simultaneously, other consumers' lifestyles and consumption choices are criticized; more affluent counterparts are 'possessed by' and 'blinded by' money. Criticisms are directed not only at careless consumers, but also at the whole market system, as the next quote shows:

> I rip advertisements off the back of bus seats: filth of Babylon. Buy me, waste your money. Is that supposed to make me happy? Or those ignorant ones who don't know any better, brought up in the misery of wealth, who are blinded by money and look for happiness in material things, swallow their emotions and suffocate the budding beauty that comes from within? Money is essential to the system and a good servant – but a really bad master.

Thus, within this discursive practice, the ways in which more fortunate people consume and live their daily lives are *understood* to be destructive and thoughtless; at the same time happiness is related to more immaterial, non-monetary ways of living. Even though the carriers of this practice appear to be seeking their share of society's wealth and well-being (Hill, 2002), the ways are not entangled in money. These culturally created and sustained phrases are constructed in *understandings* that are actualized in poor consumers' everyday living, showing *engagements* where money talk is critical, empowered and even proud:

> I compensate for my lack of money by baking. Eggs and flour are cheap. Food assistance packages include lots of milk powder. My love is simple and very down to earth – and that's something that money can't give you.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we have examined how Finnish poor consumers talk about money using their own narratives of their everyday life as the data. The analysis revealed four discursive practices – Moneyless is powerless, Capricious money, Wrestling with money and Happiness cannot be bought with money – that have led us to contemplate in a novel manner how the tacit cultural knowledge of money is enacted and reproduced in everyday talk and action in poverty. Our aim was to explore how money talk in poor circumstances could be harnessed to elaborate the focal concepts of poverty research – deprivation and power – suggested by Blocker et al. (2012).

To this end, we now elaborate on the discursive practices to create a theoretical illustration, labelled as 'the DNA', showing the dynamics of consumer empowerment and deprivation in poverty (Fig. 1). The illustration shows how empowerment and deprivation grow from and vary within the discursive practices of money talk in the context of poverty. By doing so, it highlights how they are exhibited in poor circumstances; when empowerment increases along discursive practices (the arrow heading right), deprivation simultaneously diminishes (arrow heading left). Furthermore, the discursive practices are situated in between deprivation and empowerment to emphasize the tensions between them, that is, how life in poverty is a constant negotiation and reproduction of deprivation and empowerment.

The first discursive practice constructed the moneyless carriers of practice as powerless actors, who are submissive to market forces and inferior

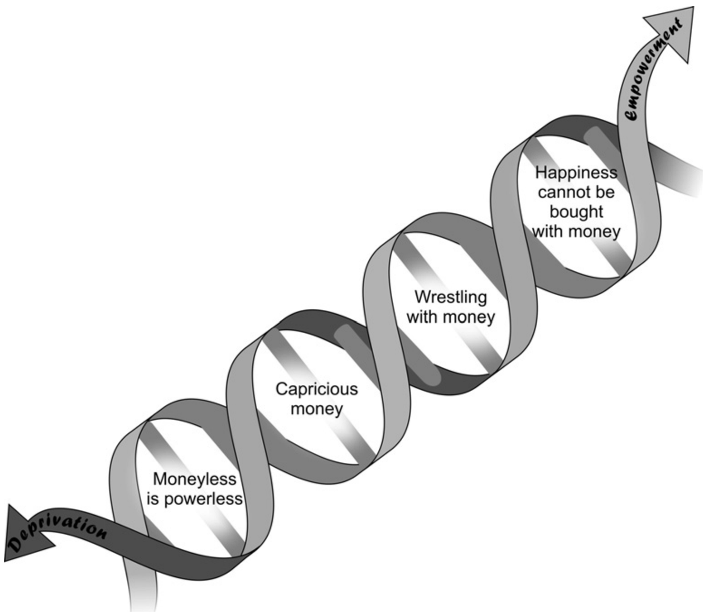

Fig. 1. The Dynamic Evolution of Consumer Empowerment and Deprivation in Poverty.

to other more powerful, 'real' consumers. This ideological struggle of culturally internalized powerlessness is characterized by monetary deprivation. Second, money itself appeared as an actor, albeit a capricious one. As money changed owners and its value, the carrier of practice was most often deprived of it, having either little or no power to control its goings or comings. The emergence of empowerment was limited to engagements in which emotional responses like humour or sarcasm were the only means of coping with capricious money.

Culturally constructed phrases also became embedded in the poor consumers' mundane doings and sayings in nuanced ways in the third discursive practice that highlighted the everyday wrestling with money. This discursive practice showcased how monetary deprivation leads the poor to resort to calculations and other practical coping strategies in their attempts to survive. The poor exert some, but a limited amount of power in carrying out this struggle in their modest daily lives. The fourth discursive practice turns the carriers of this practice into empowered and critical citizens, who

are contemptuous of other consumers who are running after money, and who accept that their own, simple life is enough.

The theoretical and methodological contribution of this study lies first in applying the discursive practice approach, as here, for the first time, discursive practices of money talk are analysed. Further, previous explorations of consumption in poverty have not focused on the meanings of money and related doings and sayings. Thus, analysing the discursive practices of money talk enabled us to construct a novel understanding of the daily living of the poor. The tangible and critical talk about shortage of money reproduced structured descriptions of the representations of money and its cultural construction in frugal frames. Third, this study builds upon the theoretical discussion by Blocker et al. (2012) when intertwining the concepts of deprivation and empowerment with the ways in which money is produced and consumed in poor consumers' talk. The discursive practices of money talk made it possible to illustrate the dynamic evolution of deprivation and empowerment in everyday doings and consumption in poverty. When approached through money talk, the practical carrying out of life in poverty did not emerge only as deprived or as empowered, but instead involves a tension between them. To illustrate, the critical tones of this talk highlight how poor consumers not only mask their poverty from outsiders (cf. Hamilton & Catterall, 2006), but also show proud and disdainful empowerment in these repressed and austere circumstances.

We follow Askegaard and Linnet (2011) who suggest that forthcoming consumer culture studies should aim to diminish the dominance of the individual level of analysis and instead seek to theorize the meaning of context. In this connection, they refer to Dilley (1999) and claim that future studies should not only consider the psychological level of analysis but also include more explicitly the external and internal contexts. In order to emphasize the cultural construction (i.e. the external and internal contexts) of poverty, we propose elaborating the concept of felt deprivation (Blocker et al., 2012) through conceptualizations of *alienation*. Seminal thinkers such as Baudrillard (1988) and Cushman (1990) present how consumer society and market forces are alienating and dystopian and leave consumers fragmented and confused, with only superficially independent identities. Accordingly, introducing the conceptualization of alienation to discussions on poverty would be a plausible means of capturing the cultural and social interactions that evolve when everyday doings are structured as cultural-level actualizations in poverty. Furthermore, we suggest that future studies could further elaborate on the complexity that emerges in everyday living

in poverty by broadening and challenging the dichotomy of deprivation and empowerment (Blocker et al., 2012).

Our study began with a reference to the true story of a single father, who faced criticism for earning too much money to be defined as poor. Much of this criticism was based on more affluent consumers' viewpoints. When considered from the perspective of poor consumers' talk, this issue is not that straightforward. It appears that discursive practices open up the multidimensional cultural representations of money in a way that means poverty cannot be defined solely on the grounds of amount of money. Hence, money talk reveals a variety of ways of constructing poverty in consumer society. The poor are not a single, coherent category of consumers who all consume alike; instead, the consumption practices that evolve from deprivation and empowerment exhibit a great variety of mundane performativity.

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MAPPING THE REAL AND THE FALSE: GLOBALIZATION AND THE BRAND IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Erika Kuever

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *To show that Chinese consumers are constantly redefining and revaluing goods along the axes of the real and the false, with little regard for legal definitions of brand authenticity or "fakeness."*

Methodology/approach – *The data was collected through interviews, focus groups, observations, and casual conversations over 16 months of ethnographic research in Beijing, China.*

Findings – *In their everyday consumption practices and navigation of a complex and often dangerous marketplace, Chinese consumers categorize products based on their perceived "truth." The paper introduces a typology that describes these local categories and explains their utility for consumers.*

Research limitations/implications – *The data was primarily conducted in an urban capital with a highly educated and high-average-income*

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populace, thus it does not represent all Chinese consumers or a statistical sample.

Practical/social implications – *This paper explains how the same globalizing processes that helped brands establish themselves in the Chinese market now threaten the capability of all brands to gain and retain the trust of consumers*

Originality/value – *By explaining how new calculations of value are being produced under glocalized regimes of manufacture and distribution, this research makes an important contribution to our understandings of brands and their limits.*

Keywords: China; consumers; authenticity; fakes; brands; globalization

Research on how the brand functions for consumers has long focused on its intangible, symbolic aspects, rather than the materiality of the goods brands mark. Existing scholarship focuses on brands as carriers of meaning (Arvidsson, 2006; McCracken, 1993, 1986), status symbols (Gerth, 2010), and the means through which individuals "experience and express the social world" (Holt, 2002). Consumers, however, expect more from their brands then status, symbolic value, and social meaning: well-respected brands should lower information costs for consumers (Erdem & Swait, 2004) by assuring buyers of the quality and safety of goods, their material content and function, their coverage under warranty, and so on. Branded goods do not merely provide a "semantic link" to a set of ideas or qualities (Pang, 2008), they are "baptized" (Nakassis, 2012), and go out into the world carrying the symbolic and literal essence of the corporate body that authorized their production. In contemporary China brands act as status-markers and meaning-makers, but in this era of globalized production and distribution and sophisticated counterfeiting they can no longer be relied upon to communicate information about the products they mark. What is happening in China today shows us how little we know about how globalizing processes have influenced consumers' understandings of authenticity (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), their conceptions of "real" and "fake."

My work focuses on how Chinese consumers strive to purchase safe, quality goods for themselves and their families in an environment of

"authenticity anxiety" (Notar, 2006). This research is based on data collected from interviews, focus groups, and casual conversations over 16 months of ethnographic research in Beijing, China, from 2009 to 2010. I argue here that some of the same globalizing processes that helped international brands establish themselves in the Chinese market now threaten the capability of all brands to gain and retain the trust of consumers. In their everyday consumption practices and navigation of the complex and often dangerous marketplace, Chinese consumers are constantly redefining and revaluing goods along the axes of the real and the false. In this paper, I introduce a typology, inspired by Vann's (2006) work in Vietnam, to describe these local categories and explain their utility for consumers. I show that legal definitions of authenticity or "fakeness" are not universal, using the Chinese context to show how new calculations of value are being generated under glocalized regimes of manufacture and distribution. This research is valuable both for consumer researchers who need to understand how the function of the brand can be transformed by globalization, as well as for marketers working with consumers, Chinese or otherwise, concerned with the safety and quality of products.

My paper begins with a brief look at the function of the brand in historical and present day China. I argue the brand functions differently in purchases of noncomestibles such as apparel than it does in purchases of ingestible goods like pharmaceuticals or infant formula, calling attention to the important role of brands in gaining the trust of consumers. While foreign brands are still desired, and often preferred to national brands, I explain that globalization has disrupted brands' promises of value and equivalence. The rapid spread of technology means copycats can produce products as good, or even better, than the original; the complexity of manufacture and distribution means high-quality rejects are often available as seconds or on the black market; and finally, market-specific production and distribution and differing national regulatory and legal regimes mean *where* you buy is often more important than *what* you buy. I conclude by introducing the categories of fake and real goods that emerged from observations and conversations during my research, showing that a brand is not enough to assure anxious buyers of infant formula or medicine. This paper makes an important contribution to consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) by using ethnographic data to reveal that the value of the brand has been fundamentally destabilized by globalizing processes, which in turn have increased the importance of national regimes of law and regulation in guaranteeing the quality and safety of goods.

THE BRAND IN CHINA

In various forms and with differing functions, brands have existed in China for thousands of years (Eckhardt & Bengtsson, 2009; Hamilton & Lai, 1988)). In Imperial China, brands marked a good as the product of a particular workshop, while also conveying the status of its owner. Contemporary Chinese consumers make ample use of brands as carriers of meaning (Arvidsson, 2006; McCracken, 1993, 1986) and status symbols (Gerth, 2010), but they also want brands to connect a product to a coherent supply chain, or more simply, to provide information on a products' origin, materials, and manufacture.[1] Scholars based in wealthy, "developed" nations with strong regulatory and legal systems tend to focus on symbolic value and social meaning in their research because as consumers they need not look to brands for assurances. Generally speaking, their governments can be trusted to keep dangerous or faulty goods off local shelves. While issues of contamination occur from time to time, the almost routine food and drug scandals that occur in China would be unimaginable in North America, Europe, Singapore, Australia, or Japan. As Pang observes, "Those in the developed world find these fatal incidents shocking mostly because they have taken commodities for granted. Would any parent doubt the nutritional value of beautifully packaged formula sold in supermarkets? Would patients question the medication they receive in hospitals?" (2008, p. 132).[2]

The melamine-tainted milk and infant formula scandal of 2008 (Moore, 2008; New York Times, n.d.), following close on the heels of a similar scandal in 2004 (BBC, 2004; Watts, 2004), had a catastrophic effect on consumer trust in China. Melamine was discovered in the products of dozens of dairy companies, the nation's market leaders amongst them, and as many as 294,000 babies were affected. More than 50,000 children were hospitalized for issues related to melamine consumption and at least six died (Ingelfinger, 2008). The chemical re-appeared many times for years afterward, primarily in poor, rural parts of China (Fairclough, 2010). The government response to the scandal compounded fears: leaders became aware of the contamination in the summer of 2008 but successfully covered it up until November of that year, at the cost of great suffering to Chinese citizens.[3] Consumers routinely told me that after the scandal they felt they couldn't completely trust any brands but that when buying anything to be ingested, such as food and vitamins, or absorbed by the body, such as lotion, they preferred foreign brands. Those with the resources to do so also sought these goods through channels or networks they trusted. Doubts

about what the brand can guarantee apply across all consumption contexts, but promises of quality and safety are not equally important in every purchase. When consumers buy apparel or technology, for instance, quality is important, but style and symbolism may be equally so, while for some products, safety is primary.

Foreign Brands in the Chinese Market

As late as the mid-1990s, it was often difficult for ordinary citizens to purchase imported products in mainland Chinese stores (Gerth, 2010). Limited access meant clear distinctions between foreign and domestic goods, distinctions that have faded over the last decade. Many international brands are so securely established in the Chinese market that their products are not necessarily seen as foreign; for instance, both Beijing taxi drivers I asked to take me to IKEA were confused when I referred to it as a Swedish company. Knowledge about the origin of a brand or the place of manufacture of a product can be an important part of a purchasing decision but not necessarily for the reasons outlined in the literature. Tian and Dong's (2010) Chinese informants believed that if Western companies gained access to the Chinese market, this was proof their goods were technologically superior and of higher quality than their domestic counterparts. Several of my informants brought up the party-state's cover-up of the melamine scandal and its protection of the national dairy industry, arguing foreign brands were inherently more trustworthy because they would not be shielded in this way. Consumers' preference for foreign brands concerns a state focused on increasing domestic consumption in order to stabilize the national economy and protect it from external shocks (Gerth, 2010). In response to this, state campaigns targeting foreign brands such as Apple and Volkswagen (Boehler, 2013; Einhorn, 2013; Li, 2013, see also CCTV, 2013, 2012; Gerth, 2010), have attempted to provoke reactionary nationalism by accusing these companies of discriminating against Chinese consumers.

Thakor and Kohli (1996) observe that people told a product is manufactured in one place may still think of it as the product of the country where the brand originated, but this does not hold for Chinese consumers who know how many "foreign" products, like the famously "designed in California" iphone, are manufactured in their nation. Chinese consumers may associate Western brands with nations or places they trust or respect, but they also know outsourcing, market-specific production, and complex,

international production and distribution schemes make a product or brand's true country-of-origin almost impossible to pin down (Tian & Dong, 2010, p. 7). For Chinese consumers, the international reputation of a brand or product has a much greater influence on purchasing decisions than place of manufacture, which is often China. From a corporation's perspective, notes Vann, "the fact that its products may be made in multiple sites around the world has no bearing on the authenticity or quality of those goods … Nike … upholds the notion that 'authentic' Nike shoes can be made in Vietnam, Indonesia, or Mexico as long as they are manufactured under their (Nike's) authorization" (2005, p. 477). In a nation where so many of the world's consumer goods are produced in a few square miles, the idea that products are only equivalent when they are linked by a brand name is difficult to buy. For a consumer who prioritizes quality and value, there is little, if any substantial difference between Nike trainers manufactured in Guangdong and Li Ning trainers manufactured in Guangdong, possibly at the same factory.

CHANNELS OF DISTRIBUTION AND SALE

Whether made in China or elsewhere, where products are *sold* is considered a strong predictor of quality and safety. The number one strategy for buying safely cited by my focus group participants was channel of purchase, typically a large, well-reputed department store that could be expected to sell good quality products and handle any problems that arose. A branded good at a store like this was far more trustworthy than one sold by an itinerant peddler or at the corner store. The very safest channel was to buy outside China. Chinese consumers know that products sold in wealthy countries are safer and higher quality than those on their own market because they know these countries have strong regulatory and legal systems and demanding, even activist, consumers. When discussing Chinese food scandals with Chinese friends and interviewees, I was often asked the question "Americans wouldn't stand for this, would they?" This point has been lost on those scholars who take their national regulatory regimes for granted, who may purchase imported goods or make purchases abroad, but need never worry about the safety of their medicine or children's toys. For Chinese consumers seeking safe goods, the destination market of a product is more important than where it is made or what brand it is (Gerth, 2010).

Sale through legitimate channels and authorized agents acts as a "baptismal event" for a branded good (Nakassis, 2012, p. 628). For Chinese consumers, the most legitimate outlets are often found outside the country – a Prada bag at a Prada store in Paris is more trustworthy than one purchased in Shanghai. When quality and safety is of utmost concern many mainland Chinese travel to Hong Kong to make their purchases. Pang believes rampant piracy has encouraged those who can afford it to "shift their consumption activities to Hong Kong, a more abstract brand name they now trust" (2008, p. 132). While this may be the case for electronics or luxury goods, it is not the "Hong Kong brand" that leads so many mainlanders to visit Hong Kong for the sole purpose of buying medicine or baby food (Hannon & Demick, 2013; Pang, 2008), but the belief that products that make it onto the market in Hong Kong are safer than those sold in China. This assumption holds for any number of wealthy nations (Siegel, 2013; Speelman, 2013). During my research, a Chinese friend asked me to bring back baby food from the United States for her 5-month-old daughter when I went home for a visit. When I brought her a dozen or so jars she was delighted, telling me that she had seen the same baby food brand in identical packaging sold in Beijing, but because she knew these had been sold in the United States she felt "completely confident" feeding them to her daughter.

Purchases for babies and young children are a source of great anxiety for Chinese parents and this has led to a thriving informal market in all things infant and child sourced from the markets of wealthy countries. In this context, trust in a good is based not on brand reputation or national origin but on its movement through regulatory channels and its destination in the homes of first world consumers (see Kopytoff, 1986). A retailer on the online marketplace Taobao advertised the merits of a Danish infant formula with the statement "… if baby food designated for Denmark does not meet quality standards, it cannot enter the Danish market!"[4] Brands may add value (McCracken, 1993), but the most valuable branded goods are those legitimated within a strong legal and regulatory national context. A can of Fonterra milk powder imported from New Zealand may sell for 100 yuan in a Chinese department store; an identical can of Fonterra milk powder purchased *in* New Zealand and sold on Taobao will sell for four or five times that amount.[5] A product destined for the market of a wealthy nation is understood to have traveled through strict regulatory channels, a product destined for the Chinese market carries no such guarantee, no matter the brand or the outlet where it is sold. Production for national markets means that technically identical branded products may be very different.

Many Chinese citizens believe that foreign corporations dump their lowest quality goods on the Chinese market, knowing Chinese consumers' expectations are not high and they have little means of recourse.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE CHINESE MARKET

The astonishing and rapid transformation of the Chinese economy over the last 30 years could not have been achieved without globalization and its processes. The once poor, rural, closed Chinese nation began to open up to the world at almost the precise moment the world was ready with mobile capital for foreign direct investment, able to rapidly transfer global manufacturing to low wage regions, and eager to explore new national markets for well-established brands. Globalization has dramatically shaped the Chinese marketplace we see today, where young people wearing Nike shoes and checking their iphones patronize the KFCs and Starbucks that carpet urban centers. Globalization has brought brands and brand awareness to China, but it has also added layers of complexity to an already diverse Chinese market (Croll, 2006; Davis, 2000). Consumers have far more options than they did even a decade ago, but they need the knowledge and skill to make the right choices.

Consumers in urban China have developed a sophisticated understanding of complex global practices of production and circulation and what they mean for safety. This has been both a strategic response to the constant presence of risk (Beck, 1992a, 1992b; Yan, 2012), as well as the accidental result of learning to navigate the diverse Chinese marketplace. An ordinary middle-class urbanite, for instance, may do most of his shopping at foreign or domestic supermarkets and department stores, but he may also buy fresh fruit at the entrance of his apartment complex from farmers that drive into the city every day; buy clothes at malls full of international chains like Zara and H&M, make trips to markets known for high-quality fakes of luxury brands; purchase the occasional household item or knick-knack from a mom and pop store or sidewalk seller; and purchase a variety of products online. He may also ask friends or relatives who travel or study abroad to purchase goods for him, particularly expensive products like digital cameras or ingestible goods like vitamins or infant formula. These omnivorous purchasing habits mean Chinese consumers are constantly evaluating products that cannot be contained by the simplistic categories of "real" and "fake."

Chinese Categories of Real and Fake

My elaboration of Chinese categorizations of goods is inspired by Vann's (2006) description of the typology employed by Vietnamese shoppers in Ho Chi Minh City, but my categories are framed along the axes of "false" and "real."[6] I use the term "real" not to refer to any notion of "authenticity" (see Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Notar, 2006; Vann, 2006), but to an assessment of the "truth" of an object (see also Notar, 2006). In Chinese, the term *zhen* (real) is opposed to the term *jia* (fake), except when issues of copyright are invoked, when the term *zheng* (legitimate) is employed. I translate *jia* (fake) as "false" rather than "fake" to avoid smuggling in conceptions of Intellectual Property Rights when they do not inform decisions made by Chinese consumers. My typology is two part, based first on the relationship between an object's implicit and explicit claims about brand affiliation, origin, material composition, etc., and second on consumers' evaluation of these claims. I will use the example of a Rolex watch to illustrate the differences between these categories.

A "real–real" Rolex would be made by skilled craftsmen in an authorized factory using quality materials and would be sold in official stores. Of the four watches I will describe the real–real Rolex is the most highly valued, but in the Chinese context this value is constantly under threat: a real–real is always potentially a "false–false." A consumer believes in the "realness" of a good when she buys it from trustworthy channels and finds that it meets her expectations, but her trust may be violated at any time in the life of the good. One day this "real–real" Rolex might break, and the Rolex-certified repairman might say that because it is a counterfeit, albeit a very good one, it is not covered under the official warrantee. This counterfeit, the "false–real," presents a constant challenge to the status and value of the real–real: "The counterfeit cites the baptismal brand event without actually being part of the authorizing chain of production (and profit flow) that certifies the brand good" (Nakassis, 2012, p. 632).

Following Benjamin, Pang has described the "authentic commodity" as "endowed with a kind of aura" (2008, p. 125) that the counterfeit product destroys. One need not physically place a counterfeit Rolex alongside an "authentic" product to destroy this aura, but merely plant the seed of doubt as to whether the good is what it promises to be. As counterfeiting technology has become more sophisticated, more and more goods have come under suspicion.[7] Consumers have long known that famous brand goods sold on sidewalks are likely fakes, but now they worry that even products sold in legitimate stores may be counterfeits. An informant cited

by Hennessey notes that the highest quality fakes, which he calls "triple A," are "so good that even the people that designed them probably couldn't tell the difference" (2011, p. 633). Like many I spoke to about counterfeiting and piracy, Hennessey's source insists these "fakes" are often produced by the same people and factories under contract to produce authentic branded goods; on the day shift they manufacture the genuine items, on nights and weekends their counterfeits.

Products from these same factories may enter the market in other ways: via small- or large-scale theft from factories or distributors ("leakage" or "slippage"), as slightly flawed "seconds," or as "remainders" from excess stock. This phenomenon creates considerable complications for the consumer: A Rolex watch purchased at a department store in Shanghai, for example, could be an counterfeit copy that had entered the market via criminal networks; a watch identical but for a slight scratch on the face and a missing brand stamp might sell through informal channels for a tenth of the price, a Rolex in all but name. This watch is not a fake, but a real—false: it is "true" because it is identical to the "legitimate" object, but makes no claims to legitimacy. Seconded luxury products may be rare, but accessible real—false goods proliferate. Every sizeable Chinese city hosts a number of small *waimao*, or "foreign trade" shops that feature low-priced apparel originally destined for export. Some items may have slight flaws, but because they were made for export they are expected to be of good quality. Shop owners purchase their stock from factories in Guangdong, who first remove all identifying tags, showing the company that contracted the item wishes to disaffiliate from it. Once in their lifetime these were branded goods, but to consumers, the removal of a tag does nothing to delegitimize these products.

The false—real category helps to clarify the indigenous distinction made between products masquerading as the real thing, and products that make no such claim (or which have more complex stories of production and distribution). The pirated DVDs sold in the back rooms of stores all over China make no pretense of having been authorized by official distributors or produced in factories under contract to them. These, like the *shanzhai* goods I discuss later, are "false—falses," or known fakes. Most of the products classified as *daoban* (pirated) sold in China fall under this category, and most are of little concern to consumers, Chinese or foreign.[8] The crucial distinction in this system is not between the real and the fake but between the known and the unknown. Known counterfeits only refer to the brands or products they imitate, they do not claim equivalence or any connection to the legitimate production of these products. According to Nakassis, "the

'knowing wink' of the fake good is the mark that metacommunicates that this is a citation (of a citation), not the 'real' thing at all" (2012, p. 632). This distinguishes the known counterfeit from the unknown, where the counterfeit cites brand essence by acting "as if."

I avoid the term piracy here in favor of counterfeit when discussing false–real goods in order to capture the distinction made by Chinese consumers themselves. If a product is known to be a fake, a buyer can make an informed decision based on quality, trustworthiness of the seller, and estimated value. If, on the other hand, a product "lies" to the consumer about its origin, materials, purity, etc., a buyer is cheated, or worse. This distinction is also visible in the alternate meaning of counterfeit cited by Tian and Dong. They point out that when foreign companies sell the lowest quality versions of their "legitimate" branded goods through legitimate sellers, these products are also called counterfeits (2010, p. 49). Consumers may seek degrees of assurance by buying famous brand goods from established and trusted retailers, but they know that not all branded products are identical, even when they are all "legitimate."

Several of the younger participants in my focus groups were enthusiastic buyers of *shanzhai* goods, products that reference well-known brands, but sell for a fraction of the price.[9] Translating literally to "mountain fortress," *shanzhai* refers to something outside official control (Chao, 2009; Hennessey, 2011), and has become shorthand for a certain kind of popular knock-off, including events like the "people's spring festival gala," and people, such as Mao impersonators and other celebrity lookalikes. Mobile phones are one of the most popular *shanzhai* products, and the most famous of these is the "Orange" phone. The Orange employs Nakassis' (2012) "knowing wink," playfully referencing the iphone, but making a clear distinction between itself and the product made by Apple. *Shanzhai* goods make no pretense of authenticity, which is why I categorize them as "false–falses." Young people are the primary buyers of *shanzhai* goods – older Chinese may not even know the term. These young consumers appreciate that *shanzhai* goods are affordable and varied, allowing them opportunities for self-expression without excessive expenditure (Wu & Li, 2009). One of my focus group participants bought mostly *shanzhai* fashion online and told me she felt more confident making these purchases than buying similar goods at a mall – she felt that at least she knew what she was getting.

A false–false *shanzhai* version of the watch we have been following might be called the Nolex. It would mimic the Rolex in style, but its quality would be expected to align with its price point. The Nolex would be

manufactured in Southern China as part of a new flexible and fast-moving process of design and production. *Shanzhai* products can be developed quickly and adapt rapidly to the dynamic Chinese market, so the Nolex might have special features to appeal to Chinese consumers (Leng & Zhang, 2011). *Shanzhai* products rely on their implied similarity to established brands and well-known products to attract customers, but some also aspire to establish reputations of their own.[10] In the long term, *shanzhai* products may pose a greater threat to big foreign brands than IPR-violating companies. The consumption of counterfeit products, argues Pang "indirectly reinforces the value of the model" (Pang, 2008, p. 132), fake Prada handbags serving to increase brand visibility and potentially enhance the appeal of owning a real—real Prada. *Shanzhai* goods reference famous brands, but in time may become their rivals. Whether internationally recognized or domestic *shanzhai*, the brands that dominate the Chinese market tomorrow will be those that learn how to gain and retain the trust of millions of cautious Chinese consumers.

CONCLUSION

In the rich countries of North America and Europe, recent scandals involving toothpaste, dog food, and tainted milk powder have led to widespread concern over the safety of goods from China. Melamine contamination was not confined to infant formula, but was discovered everywhere from eggs to wheat gluten, not only in China, but in the United States and Europe, feeding fears that in this global market no one is entirely safe (Ingelfinger, 2008). Fear and uncertainty of what lies hidden in food, toys, or pharmaceuticals (Singer & Baer, 2008), has boosted interest in local food, backyard farming, and products with traceable origins. These same trends are at work in parts of China, where organic food co-ops have sprung up in large cities (Al Jazeera English, 2011), and urbanites have begun purchasing plots of land outside the city where they grow their own vegetables or entrust local farmers to do so on their behalf. Responding to these anxieties, some retailers have learned that they can preserve the reputation of their brands (and charge a premium) by strictly controlling every step from production to distribution. Hong Kong drug store chain Watson's has hit upon one innovative strategy for their bottled water. By allowing only official distributors to deliver their water, they evade widespread suspicions that dog most brands, and charge 300% of the going rate for the assurance this provides.[11]

The companies behind famous brands want us to believe that production is "the privileged moment or phase in the story of a commodity" (Foster, 2006, p. 290) but these examples highlight the importance of the channels through which goods move. Lacking trust in the safety of products on the Chinese market, consumers have found ways to "enchant the network by re-embedding it in relations of trust" (Foster, 2006, p. 290). They seek safety through knowledge and strategy, purchasing through channels such as large department stores or foreign markets. From the perspective of Chinese consumers the categories "real" and "fake" are of little utility when evaluating and selecting goods. This phenomenon is not unique to China. As Vann notes for Vietnamese consumers in Ho Chi Minh City, "the terms real and fake call into question not the authenticity of a product, but its existence: whether a product is actually a product at all" (2006, p. 286). According to legal definitions of brand and copyright (see Coombe, 1998), a counterfeit is a counterfeit, whether a buyer knows it or not, but for consumers, knowledge makes all the difference. My data reveals the effects of the process of glocalization on brand "authenticity" in the Chinese context: globalizing forces have destabilized the value of the brand and challenged its claims of equivalence across all contexts, while localizing efforts have concentrated on re-categorizing and re-contextualizing goods. These efforts can be seen as processes of authentification, and further research and study will be necessary to understand their connection to regimes of value and authenticity elsewhere in the world.

NOTES

1. Like citizens of other post-socialist nations, Chinese consumers have learned that they need goods to construct their selves (McCracken, 1993) and they have built personal relationships with brands, relationships tied to their social groups and personal life projects (Coulter, Price, & Feick, 2003). However, the meanings they access or create are unpredictable. The consumers in Oswald's (2011) study have difficulty deciphering the sign systems used by advertisers and marketers to shape the meaning of brands, those surveyed by Tian and Dong (2010) use Western brands to express their vision of their own national identity.

2. As Erdem and Swait note in their discussion of brand origin, perceived risk is usually dealt with "in the initial screening before the brand choice stage (2004, p. 192)," at which point high-risk brands are excluded from consideration. This is not the case for Chinese shoppers, for whom risk is present at every stage and cannot be excluded. On brand origin see also Pecotich and Rosenthal (2001).

3. High-profile punishments for both regulators and company heads (Oleson, 2007; Vause, 2009), did little to assuage consumer concerns of a reoccurrence.

4. Author's own translation from Chinese.

5. This example provides further evidence of the importance of what I call foreign sourcing. In 2013, New Zealand-based Fonterra, one of the world's biggest dairy companies, admitted that an *E. coli* outbreak in one of its factories was responsible for sickening babies in China. The milk powder they sold domestically was unaffected (Agence France-Presse, 2014; Howard & Burkitt, 2013).

6. In the Limits of Authenticity (2006) Vann describes four emic categories of goods employed by shoppers in Ho Chi Minh City: model goods, mimic goods, real goods, and fake goods. She argues that Vietnamese shoppers make distinctions between real and fake goods, but these distinctions are not based on imported notions of product and brand authenticity.

7. Three decades of rapid economic growth in China has meant that even the most remote places have been flooded with new objects of unknown or uncertain origin, leading to "authenticity anxiety" (Notar, 2006). This has led to a lack of trust in not only objects, but people, from policemen to nuns, because "everything can be faked" (Notar, 2006).

8. Some may actually defend pirating practices, arguing that most Chinese consumers could never afford the royalties demanded by foreign movie studios, or that as a developing country, China should be able to benefit from piracy as so many before it were able to (Tian & Dong, 2010).

9. Leng and Zhang (2011) see shanzhai as a special kind of brand, while Wu and Li (2009) argue that young consumers use shanzhai products to express an "anti-brand style." In my research, consumers of shanzhai products consumers enjoyed the way shanzhai brands playfully point to and parody the expensive, established brands they mimic, but primarily sought function and value, not meaning, from these goods.

10. The Chinese brand eyu, meaning "alligator" makes shirts and other apparel for men featuring a logo similar to the famous Lacoste alligator. The national success of this brand suggests that this strategy can be effective.

11. It is widely believed that all of the half-dozen brands dominating the market are frequently counterfeited, often by the small businesses charged with delivery to homes and businesses, who refill empty bottles with tap water and re-seal them.

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ADAPTING ETHNOGRAPHY: AN EXAMPLE OF EMERGING RELATIONSHIPS, BUILDING TRUST, AND EXPLORING COMPLEX CONSUMER LANDSCAPES

Prabash Edirisingha, Robert Aitken and Shelagh Ferguson

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *In this paper, we provide a practical example of how ethnographic insight is obtained in the field. In so doing, we demonstrate multiple ways in which ethnographic approaches can be adapted during on-going research processes to develop rich and multiple emic/etic perspectives.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This paper is based upon the first author's reflective experience of undertaking ethnographic field work. The discussion draws from a multi-method, longitudinal and adaptive*

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ethnographic research design, which aimed to capture the process of new family identity formation in Sri Lanka.

Originality/value – *Existing research gives us excellent insight into various methods used in contemporary ethnographic research and the kinds of insight generated by these methods. With few exceptions, these studies do not give significant insight into the specifics of the ethnographic research process and the adaption practice. Thus, we provide a practical example of how ethnographic insight is obtained in the research field.*

Discussion/findings – *Our discussion elaborates the ways in which we integrated multiple research methods such as participant observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, informal sessions, Facebook interactions, adaptations of performative exercises and elicitation methods to overcome complexities in cultural, mundane and personal consumption meanings. We also discuss how closer friendships with informants emerged as a consequence of the ethnographic research adaption practice and how this influenced trust and confidence in researcher-informant relationship, presenting us with a privileged access to their everyday and personal lives.*

Keywords: Ethnography; qualitative research; multi-method research; complex research topics; observational research; friendship as method

Adaptation is an essential and customary practice in ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It enables the ethnographic researcher to remain flexible and continue longitudinal immersion in order to develop rich emic/etic perspectives (Denzin, 1989). Skilled ethnographic researchers have triangulated multi-method (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991) and multi-sited (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003) approaches to develop 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of complex research topics such as negotiation of sensitive (Kates, 2002; Langer & Beckman, 2005), exclusive (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and undesirable (Hill, 1991) meanings in consumption. In addition, researchers have employed ethnographic methods to explore topics such as mundane (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012) and special (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991) family practices. These studies have often highlighted the importance of using multiple methods such as interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010), observations (Gummesson, 2007), informal sessions (Agar, 1996) and various elicitation techniques (Heisley & Levy, 1991)

to build trust and confidence of research informants. In addition, there is an increased number of other research tools that have the potential to add to the ever-growing list of ethnographic researcher's toolkit, such as the use of mobile phones (Hein, O'Donohoe, & Ryan, 2011), projective methods (Rook, 2006), stories and narratives (Hopkinson & Hogg, 2006; Tedlock, 1983) and performative methods (Foster, 2012). Thus, the benefits of potential ethnographic research tools and adaptation practices are well documented in extant literature (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003).

With few exceptions (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Hein et al., 2011; Sherry, 2006; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), there has been little research that sheds light onto ethnographic adaptation practices and demonstrates the ways in which ethnographic adaptation contributes to overcoming challenges in sensitive and complex research contexts. We know little about the potential challenges ethnographic researchers may confront during the actual ethnographic adaptation practice, when exploring complex consumer landscapes. There is a need to elaborate how ethnographic researchers could remain flexible and creatively draw from multiple methods available to them in their toolkit to overcome complex socio-cultural variations in the field (Joy, 1994). Especially, as the researcher is a critical component of ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), it is important to elaborate how ethnographic adaptation develops the researcher as an essential vehicle of immersion during the data collection. Hence, in this paper, we attempt to address these gaps by providing a practical example of how ethnographic insight is obtained in the field. In doing so, we demonstrate the ways in which ethnographic approaches can be adapted to gain trust and confidence of research informants during on-going research projects and how it increases the researcher's ability to develop rich insight. Specifically, by creatively integrating multiple research tools already available to ethnographic researchers, we demonstrate how we expanded the boundaries of what could be considered 'private' emotions and 'closed' family practices by facilitating informants' trust and confidence.

The practice of ethnographic adaptation we discuss here refers to the creative and flexible triangulation (Jick, 1979) of appropriate methods from the ethnographic researcher's toolkit in order to intimately understand informants' lived experiences (such as in Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). It enables the ethnographic researcher to develop rich emic/etic interpretations of intricate cultural practices. Whether it is going back to traditional roots of

ethnography in taking field notes or embracing emerging methods, attentive and creative adaption of ethnographic research approaches enables researchers to remain flexible and sustain deep immersion.

We have structured this paper as follows: first, we summarise relevant literature focusing on the value of ethnography as a research method and the types of knowledge particularly gained from various data collection methods. Second, we introduce the background of our research and outline how the initial ethnographic research design was adapted during on-going field work. Third, drawing from an example of new family identity formation, we demonstrate how we adapted to challenges emerged during the research by integrating multiple research tools, such as informal sessions, Facebook interactions and various elicitation techniques. Finally, we explain some of the ethical implications we confronted and suggest some useful ethical practices utilised in conducting adaptive ethnographic research.

LITERATURE

Pioneered in social sciences (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Miller, 2008) ethnography has a unique potential to go beneath superficial and/or socially desirable meanings (Goulding, 2005). As even the most articulate informants can fail to comprehensively describe the culturally shaped meanings in their actions (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) or may not be conscious of all aspects of their experiences (Brewer, 2000), ethnographic research design is flexible in adapting to understand personal and sensitive emotions entangled in everyday social interactions (Gumperz, 1981; Joy, 1994). However, negotiating access to study complex research contexts and continuing longitudinal immersion to explore sensitive issues (Kates, 2002; Langer & Beckman, 2005) have always been a challenge for ethnographic researchers, mainly due to issues of developing trust and confidence with informants (Hoffman, 1980; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

In consumer culture research, ethnography has become a particularly useful approach when seeking to understand socio-cultural and situational meanings that underpin consumption behaviour (Arnould & Price, 2006; Mariampolski, 2006). When conducted appropriately, ethnographic methods have produced holistic insights into consumption practices in exclusive subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), undesirable life

circumstances (Hill, 1991), everyday lived experiences (Daly, 2001; Hein et al., 2011) and private family celebrations (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Ethnographic approaches are especially useful in understanding meanings in everyday and mundane consumption practices (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012) because of their capability to observe informants in their natural setting over long periods and capture their lived experiences while informants carry out their everyday tasks.

However, there is no universal framework for conducting ethnographic research (Gobo, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Joy, 1994). As depicted in literature (Belk & Costa, 1998; Belk et al., 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), each ethnographic approach can integrate a unique blend of different research methods and still retain its capacity to produce rich data from multiple methods into useful emic/etic interpretations. Especially as it is looking to embrace disjunctures of perspectives (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994), adopting multiple methods furnishes rich interpretations of cultural meanings.

Conventionally, ethnographic researchers have integrated various observational methods (Gummesson, 2007), different forms of interviews (Hogg, Folkman, Curasi, & Maclaran, 2004) and elicitation techniques (Heisley & Levy, 1991). For example, ethnographic observations help overcome self-censorship, social desirability and biases of acquiescence (Arnould, 1998, p. 93) by focusing on perspectives in action (Belk & Kozinets, 2005). Ethnographic interviews bring 'reflexive or prospective' accounts (perspectives of action) of meanings that relate to informants' past behaviours and future expectations (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). However, one of the richest forms of ethnographic data is generated from informal conversations, which widely take place during a range of everyday experiences because of their spontaneous and informant-driven nature (Agar, 1996; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003).

Thus, the benefits of in-depth interviews, participant observations and informal ethnographic conversations are well documented in prior research (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1991; Belk et al., 1989; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The integration of visual methods such as video (Belk & Kozinets, 2005) and photography (Basil, 2011; Heisley & Levy, 1991) to aid in traditional ethnographic data recording methods is also well established in extant literature. There is also a growing interest in understanding how emerging technologies such as advances in mobile phone technologies (Hein et al., 2011) and computer-mediated environments (Kozinets, 2002, 2006) facilitate ethnographic research practice.

In addition, as suggested in ethnographic texts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, 2007; Mariampolski, 2006) and examples (Belk et al., 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), iterative and hermeneutic adaptation is intrinsic to ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) in order to develop rich emic/etic perspectives. Extending ethnography through visual ethnography (Pink, 2007), elicitation methods (Heisley & Levy, 1991), netnography (Kozinets, 2002, 2006), sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009) and use of social media networks (Postill & Pink, 2012) have enabled new ways to reach previously inaccessible communities and cultures. Using internet and social networks are becoming increasingly useful to ethnographic research (Jackson, 2012; Postill & Pink, 2012). For example, integrating Facebook in ethnographic research has facilitated capturing mundane lived experiences of informants (Baker, 2013). Adopting performative ethnographic methods has enabled researchers to understand sensitive emotions that underpin complex social issues in more practical and less obtrusive ways (Foster, 2012). Therefore, there is a range of other methods that can be integrated to ethnography, such as projective methods (Rook, 2006), stories (Hopkinson & Hogg, 2006) and mixed methods, which combine both qualitative as well as quantitative tools (Bahl & Milne, 2006). Drawing from extant literature, we concur, that multi-method and iterative nature of ethnographic research can be immensely valuable, or perhaps, essential to explore complex consumption practices. It emphasises the fact that as much as there are ways to begin an ethnographic project, there are also ways to evolve it.

Although adaption is an intrinsic aspect of ethnography, surprisingly few studies (Belk et al., 1988; Hein et al., 2011; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991) have elaborated upon evolving ethnographic research designs. Both novice as well as seasoned ethnographic researchers can benefit from examples of how ethnographic research can be adapted during on-going research processes in response to dynamic challenges within the research context. Thus, the following example and the subsequent discussion address this gap by elaborating how we used and adapted a multi-method and longitudinal ethnography. We demonstrate how friendships emerged as an outcome of our ethnographic adaptation practice and how it enabled building trust. We also demonstrate how trust facilitated access, sustained immersion and enabled rich emic/etic interpretations. We elaborate specific contextual, situational and methodological challenges that were confronted and discuss how we adapted the ethnographic research design in order to gain insight into the ways in which new families re-negotiated identities, synthesised relationships and re-constructed special and mundane consumption practices.

THE CASE STUDY: THE PRACTICE OF ADAPTATION

The Background

Our research explored identity and consumption re-formation processes in new family households. Most of the identity re-formations in new families take place within the mundanity of everyday life, such as during everyday meal preparations practices (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012; Molander, 2011). Thus, our preliminary ethnographic research design comprised two stages (before and after marriage) and was planned to be carried out over an 18-month period in New Zealand, using video recorded, in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Participant observation sessions aimed to capture perspectives in action of everyday lived experiences. For example, we intended to observe how participants re-formulated the use of important material objects, preparation of family meals and re-configuration of parental relationships. In addition, the semi-structured, in-depth interviews were expected to provide reflexive emic interpretations of informants' behaviours.

Our research context was complex for several reasons. First, identity formation during transitions is a challenging topic due to its dynamic and perpetual nature (Epp & Price, 2008; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). As suggested in previous literature, people struggle to elaborate their transformative experiences while going through and negotiating liminality (McCracken, 2008; Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960). Second, the family context has always challenged researchers, especially because of its closed and private nature (Belk, 2010; Miller, 2001, 2008). Thus, gaining access to explore everyday family practices is particularly a complex challenge for ethnographic researchers (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Third, couples who are about to get married are a difficult group to recruit (Kemmer, 1999). Therefore, we drew purposive samples of Sri Lankan couples in order to overcome initial challenges of recruiting informants (further discussed in the following section). During our ethnographic field work, building a close personal relationship with informants emerged as an essential step towards facilitating trust and confidence in the informant-researcher relationship. It challenged us to sustain deep immersion and develop rich emic/etic perspectives. Thus, adapting the longitudinal ethnographic research approach was essential to explore socio-culturally shaped everyday lived experiences of new families and to understand how they re-formulated identity during the transition.

The data collection was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 (before marriage) explored the nature of individual identity leading up to marriage and how informants anticipated forming their new family identities. Consequently, Stage 2 (after marriage) explored the complex ways in which new families formed shared family identities. The first author was physically present in Sri Lanka during both stages (three months during Stage 1 and five months during Stage 2). He also lived in New Zealand during the initial and final stages as well as in between first and second stage (Fig. 1).

The practice of adaptation took place over 18 months as the ethnographic field work progressed in order to overcome various contextual and methodological challenges (Fig. 1). Drawing from extant literature, we integrated informal sessions (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003), adapted observations (Gummesson, 2007), used Facebook social networking platforms (Baker, 2013) and introduced performative elicitation tasks (Foster, 2012; Heisley & Levy, 1991) to overcome a range of contextual, methodological

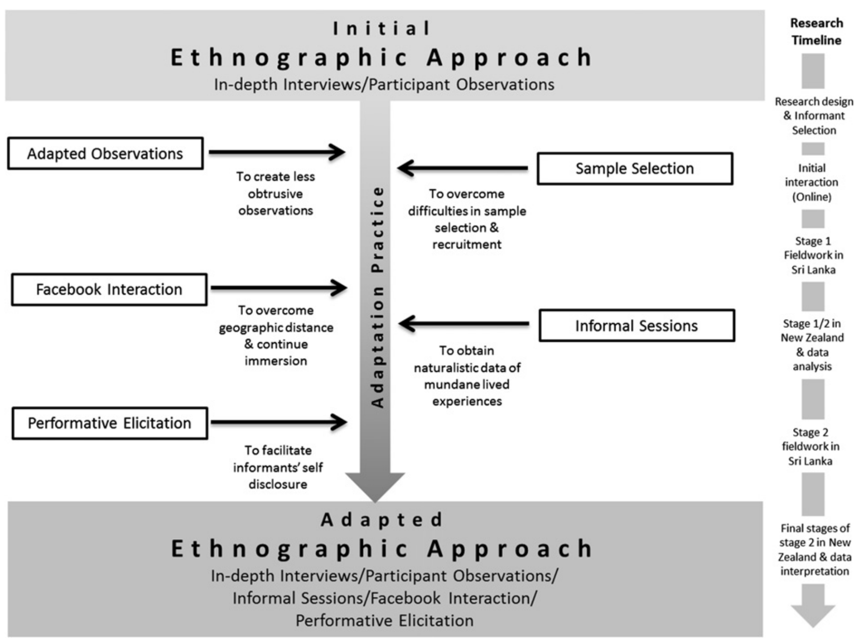

Fig.1. Ethnographic Adaptation by Integrating Multiple Research Methods to Explore New Family Identity Formation.

and situational complexities. The first author was physically present in Sri Lanka

In the remaining sections, we demonstrate how our hermeneutic and iterative process of ethnographic research adaption provided a useful methodological framework to access complexities in meanings and practices in the formation of identities. Specifically, we explain what research implications we confronted, why we implemented each method, how integrating each method facilitated informants' trust and what kind of complex (sensitive/unrealised/mundane/longitudinal) insights they generated.

Importance of Purposive Samples and Value of Researcher's Prior Experience

As suggested by Kemmer (1999), we experienced that men and women who are about to get married are a difficult group to recruit. In addition, the establishment of a threshold step of committing to a new family was an important factor in our research, thereby creating a starting point to map longitudinal change and understand its influence on identity and consumption. However, it was challenging for us to establish the specific point of relationship commitment because in many westernised countries a large number of families included cohabiting couples (Statistics New Zealand, 2012; United States Census Beaurau, 2013). Consequently, our first adaptations were made in response to overcome the challenges of informant selection and recruitment.

Given our research aim to understand deep and underpinning meanings in new family identity, we drew purposive samples (Hoffman, 1980) from the first author's network and selected Sri Lankan couples. The first author also had access to new couples through his family's wedding services business in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, a new family is most often formed by marriage and cohabitation is rare if not discouraged due to socio-cultural and religious influences (Malhotra & Tsui, 1996; Wijesekera, 1990). Selecting purposive samples from the first author's personal network enabled us to overcome challenges in participant selection and recruitment in order to progress the research project.

In addition, having negotiated the same transition in Sri Lanka, the first author's own experiences brought an insider perspective (Paechter, 2012) and improved his ability to empathise with informants' shared experiences. His familiarity with intricate Sri Lankan cultural traditions and customs

was useful during the interpretation and triangulation of multiple sources of information (Foster, 2012).

As discussed in past research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hoffman, 1980), drawing purposive samples within the first author's acquaintances helped us to build trust and more naturally obtain personal and intimate information about informants' personal lives. Having some sort of prior acquaintance, most informants allowed us access to explore their everyday family practices and produced more informative and insightful data during the interviews. In addition, informants who had closer prior acquaintances, such as friends of close friends, rendered multiple new possibilities to immerse in their everyday lives. For example, they invited us to their Facebook profiles providing us with a useful means of overcoming geographical barriers during the early stages of data collection, especially when the first author was living in New Zealand.

Therefore, our decision to select purposive samples enabled us to overcome complexities in sample selection and recruitment. However, the Sri Lankan context brought unique contextual challenges such as the need to build close relationships with informants, before being able to gain access to explore mundane family practice, thereby making the exploration of new family identity formation a particularly a complex topic.

Starting with In-Depth Interviews and Participant Observation

Our field work began with in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation sessions. In-depth interviews were often carried out in informants' homes. By relying on non-directive and directive (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) questioning we aimed to create emic perspectives (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) of informants' daily routines, future expectations, personal meanings, cultural affiliations and core values. Participant observations were expected to provide a complementary source of data by capturing perspectives in actions (Belk & Kozinets, 2005). Observations were conducted in informants' homes as well as in outdoor locations such as in shopping outlets. These consisted of the researcher accompanying informants to observe activities such as shopping sessions, arranging household furniture and preparing everyday meals.

One of the important reasons why we opted to video record observations was in order to avoid the 'fleeting nature of most observations' (Basil, 2011), especially in a brisk and dynamic activity such as shopping and enable us to fully capture perspectives in action. In addition, using video

recording to capture a transformational experiences such as new family formation was identified as a uniquely beneficial method especially during the data representation stage, which allow the audiences to become more involved and engaged with the research findings holistically (Ferguson & Todd, 2006; Hietanen, Rokka, & Schouten, 2013). Even though we expected informants to feel uneasy at first, we also expected them to eventually acclimatise to the presence of the video camera (Belk & Kozinets, 2005; Pink, 2007). Given the deep and intricate meanings in everyday cultural practices we were exploring, it was useful to have more time to reflect on and analyse informants' everyday practices, and the use of visual methods emerged as the obvious choice of data recording to accomplish this particular objective (Pink, 2007; Schembri & Boyle, 2013). We planned to make it less obtrusive by using a tripod, especially during the observations conducted in informants' homes. However, we did not anticipate the attention the hand-held video camera drew from other people, especially when conducting observations in public spaces.

The presence of the video camera made our informants (as well the first author) feeling uncomfortable during the shopping sessions. As it severely compromised the naturalistic capture of everyday practice, the use of a video camera in these occasions became a barrier to the richness we set out to obtain. Consequently, we stopped using the video camera in these public locations, especially in shopping malls. However, knowing that previous ethnographic studies have effectively used the mobile phone in observations (Hein et al., 2011), we used the mobile phone video camera to capture important practices and conversations in public spaces in order to compensate. However, the first author decided which occasions to video record by using his judgement based on his knowledge of the context and his situation specific experiences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). For example, he used the mobile phone to video record small clips when informants were by themselves, but used audio recording or verbal field notes when in crowded locations. Accordingly, using the mobile phone to video record small clips and take pictures of important objects and occasions attracted considerably less attention from the other people in public spaces than using the full-fledged video camera. Building on this experience, we integrated the mobile phone more prominently by also using it to take verbal and textual field notes (in addition to taking video and pictures) during the subsequent outdoor observation sessions. From prior studies we were aware that taking lengthy field notes can inhibit the researcher's capacity to actively engage with informants and can become too obtrusive during participant observations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, creating verbal field

notes provided a less obtrusive way to record important glosses and over-generalisations (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) as it enabled us to remain deeply engaged in the shopping experience.

Using a 'hands free device' with the mobile phone, the first author was able to actively engage and interact more with informants during the shopping practices than previously planned. It allowed him to focus his attention on discussion of informants' shopping practices such as what they wanted to buy and how they intended to use what they bought. In response, informants also often began to seek first author's feedback and engaged with him for opinions about what they purchased. It normalised the articulation of the decision-making process for informants during these occasions. There were also occasions that the first author himself was drawn into buying things which he liked. Eventually, participant observation sessions with some informant couples began to feel like that the researcher was accompanying two friends to help them prepare for their wedding ceremonies, rather than going on research observations. Therefore, observations sessions with particular couples eventually transformed into becoming 'researcher-as-friend' (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014) shopping sessions generating the opportunity to capture more naturalistic and mundane everyday practices.

In addition, informants also used their own mobile phones to take pictures of their consumption practices and objects (such as bridal dresses). They occasionally shared some of these pictures with their social networks by using mobile phone applications, such as Facebook. As this was not researcher manipulated, it allowed us to co-construct a useful first-hand experience to understand how informants re-formulated their individual identities, negotiated joint consumption narratives and represented these in their social context as a new couple.

Finally, during data analysis and interpretation, using the mobile phone to adapt the ethnographic research overcame contextual and situational challenges such as external distractions and noise in these public locations. They also became indispensible during the construction of researcher diary, especially to recall important observations of mundane consumption practices, which otherwise may have gone unnoticed.

Integrating Informal Sessions

New families negotiated their identities within the mundanity of everyday family life (Epp & Price, 2008) such as when preparing everyday meals

(Cappellini & Parsons, 2012) and watching television. Such mundane practices were hard to capture by only employing in-depth interviews and participant observations. In addition, especially during the initial stages of field work, couples hesitated to talk about conflict, ambiguity and tension in their new relationships. For example, one of the couples had financial obstacles when they planned their wedding (as both of them left their jobs), but did not talk about the tensions they confronted during the time. Some informants were also optimistic about their individual and shared identities as they looked forward to their marriage and had a tendency to overlook or simply disregard possible challenges they may confront. Consequently, most informant families struggled to articulate underpinning emotions during in-depth interviews and observations. Also, even the most confident and outspoken informants did not discuss some undesirable complexities in their new relationships, such as imperfections of their partner's identities and conflicts with their in-laws. Accordingly, we realised the in-depth interviews and participant observations were limited in their ability to overcome initial social desirability and capture tensions, conflict and unrealised meanings in mundane new family lives.

During this stage, our relationships with some of the informant couples were growing beyond the typical informant-researcher relationship. There were occasions that the first author and his family were invited to participate in informants' special family occasions such as birthdays and also in mundane practices such as weekly grocery shopping. The researcher was usually invited to have a cup of tea after the sessions, and our informants continued to further explain and justify their actions and comments. For example, during an observation session, one of the male informants (a professional chef) demonstrated how he used a specific knife in his cooking and discussed how disappointed he was when it was misused by his wife. After the session ended he continued to explain how his understanding gained from negotiating meanings around the knife (with his wife) influenced other consumption decisions in their home. It actually allowed him a useful reflexion space (Joy, 1994) to think about what he already articulated and further contribute to the research. Therefore, we understood that the informal conversations (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003) were better positioned to capture informants' everyday practices, performances, sensitive family issues and their underpinning meanings at a more personal level. Consequently, we embraced these emerging friendships and adapted our ethnography by integrating informal ethnographic conversations and observations (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003) to capture personal and mundane lived experiences.

We conducted informal conversations in participants' homes while preparing meals, having afternoon tea or watching a cricket match on television. To preserve the naturalistic unfolding of events we limited taking field notes to record only potentially revelatory moments or conversations (Trigger, Forsey, & Meurk, 2012). For example, during shopping sessions the first author quickly noted or recorded few things (skeletal notes) whenever he was away from the informants. Further, during this stage we realised that writing an extensive researcher account drawing from sketchy field notes and researcher's own experiences after each session was the best form of data recording for our informal sessions.

Even though it was difficult and uncomfortable for most of our informants to share their family conflict, undesirable emotions and disappointments about partner's future expectations during interviews and observations, they felt more comfortable talking about such personal matters during informal sessions. Informal sessions also further developed friendships with particular families enhancing their trust and confidence to reveal more personal emotions. For example, in Sri Lanka it is considered disrespectful to criticise parents or partners in the presence of outsiders (Malhotra & Tsui, 1996). Therefore, our informants avoided such sensitive topics, particularly when the video camera was running. However, as friendships developed an increased level of trust was generated, the informal sessions became a space in our research where informants could vocalise their opinions with less hesitancy and risk of criticism. There were also times when the first author's family was invited to informants' family functions. In such occasions, lively group discussions generated about sensitive family topics such as dealing with in-laws and learning to share family resources. In addition, with emerging positive relationships, there were also times that, especially the female informants confided personal emotions and details of their lives to the first author's wife, creating a new ethical challenge to overcome (further discussed under ethical challenges). However, such data provided useful deep insight into the personal lives of new families about how they actually negotiated their identities behind closed doors. Therefore, adapting to spend more time with informants as they managed everyday errands and during mundane family events allowed us to get closer to our informants' everyday lives and further develop their trust and confidence.

Using Facebook to Interact, Interview and Observe

We were confronted with overcoming geographical distance throughout the research. First, during the period of data collection when the first author

was living in New Zealand (five months between Stage 1 and Stage 2) we needed to stay in touch with informants in order to maintain immersion in their everyday lives. Second, some informant couples moved to different locations (within Sri Lanka or abroad) during the research, which made it difficult to conduct interviews, observations and informal sessions.

Having previously been invited to informants' Facebook profiles we used its integrated video conferencing and chat facilities to interact with informants in real-time (Baker, 2013) to overcome geographical distance. Using Facebook chat for routine but irregular informal conversations was especially useful to learn about informants' behaviours in real-time (as they were happening or about to begin), such as what they were preparing for dinner and how they assigned tasks during meal preparation sessions. These conversations helped us get closer to everyday and mundane family decision-making practices, which are usually hard to access using other conventional methods such as interviews and participant observations:

> Today is a special meal, so I am going to cook … Today she can help and use the knife because I am here … I don't normally like when she uses it, but I don't mind it today because I can watch her. (Male/Extract from Facebook chat)

However, as the research progressed, our relationships with some of the informants became stronger, especially on Facebook. Occasional 'likes' and 'comments' on informants' Facebook postings and subsequent chats on various topics indicated our interest in informants' hobbies and their activities. In addition, our own Facebook profiles became a window to our personal lives, which enabled informants to see us as normal everyday people, rather than objective researchers. It further enhanced our friendships and built their trust and confidence. For example, one of the female informants took interest in the first author's personal life and his family and started 'liking' and 'commenting' on his postings in the Facebook profile. This friendship also continued to benefit us because it enabled her to become more outspoken and less reluctant during face-to-face field work sessions. Therefore, adapting to use Facebook as a tool for longitudinal immersion also enabled us to gradually develop friendships with informants and build their trust and confidence.

With increased levels of trust, Facebook emerged as a more capable and adaptable research tool, which provided a platform to conduct online informal conversations and passive timeline observations (Baker, 2013). It helped us in understanding deep emotions involving new joint lives such as how informants expected old identities to change and how they negotiated change during everyday life. On occasions couples revealed conflicting emotions and offered multiple perspectives to understand their new lives.

We used such disjunctures, overgeneralisations and glosses (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) to generate rich insight into ways in which they re-formulated their identities in the new family. By being invited to visit informants' Facebook profiles as a daily routine and being able to observe their status updates, shared posts and comments provided a way to map changes in their everyday lives such as changes in future expectations, symbolic meanings and core values. They revealed underlying emotions and meanings of behaviours, which are also relevant to identity negotiation in new relationships. As depicted in the following extract, one of the male informants posted a new status update (Facebook) about renovating the house and we were interested in following up how they negotiated the home renovation project:

> The house hasn't been painted in a long time ….Also I need a garden ….We are going to do some landscaping and put some new plants ….You know her parents moved to the annex in the other side, so it is just us now. I thought it is good to fix it the way I want. Now we can live the way we want. (Male/Extract from Facebook and chat)

At the beginning we were interested in the ways in which the new couple negotiated changes in their life after her parents moved out, such as how they lived 'the way they wanted'. However, further Facebook conversations (and informal sessions) helped us understand potential conflict and tension between the individuals and their in-laws:

> When we bought the sofa her mother kept making negative comments. Eventually, my wife also started second guessing and I got tired. I don't want to involve in any arguments with her parents, so I tell her to talk to them. We are adults now. I expect them to respect our decisions. (Male/Facebook chat/Informal session)

Having discussed their feelings on Facebook, our informants did not feel uncomfortable talking about such issues during face-to-face sessions. These were certainly unanticipated changes in their lives, but they were willing and in some occasions were relieved to talk about them, especially after becoming comfortable with our research. When they shared sensitive emotions and private relationship issues on Facebook it was easier to initiate further interaction. By using Facebook chat conversations and observations to probe important family identity issues before moving into deeper face-to-face sessions established a methodical and sequential approach to gradually build trust, comfort and openness. It also enabled us to recognise potentially undesirable topics that our informants did not want to talk about, and we avoided bringing those up during interviews, observations and informal sessions.

In addition, using Facebook also furnished a useful exit strategy after ethnographic data collection was completed. As we developed close friendships with some of the informant couples, it was critical to respect and sustain some of these relationships after the research. Especially, as prior studies which have used friendship as a methodology (Tillmann-Healy, 2003; Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014) emphasise the importance of not making informants 'feel like' we disguised and manipulated friendships to achieve access. However, as the first author lived in New Zealand, and was immediately occupied with analysis and interpretation upon finishing data collection, opportunities to continuously stay in touch with informants would have been rather limited with most of our informants. However, the first author continued to interact with most of the informant couples who had embraced him and his family as friends through on-going Facebook interactions. Therefore, Facebook enabled us to gradually leave the field without alienating friendships and jeopardising informants' trust, loyalties and self-respect.

Use of Performative Elicitation Techniques

There were also situations during our research where it was impractical or difficult to obtain useful information from informants. For example, one informant couple moved in with parents after the wedding and their lifestyles (especially in relation to consumption) didn't change as a result. Thus, they recognised that there were only few significant opportunities for them to negotiate change:

> My parents do everything for us. I mean they take care of household things and even drive us to work. Only expenditure we have would be if we two go out to dinner. (Male/In-depth interview)

Even though they claimed that there were no significant changes in their lives after marriage, there were changes, which our informants were not aware of and did not articulate because those changes were too subtle and superficial. Most of the informants did not recognise or acknowledge the changes that had taken place in their lives. First, this was because most negotiations during the transition took place within everyday mundane consumption practices. Second, it was because our informants preferred to look positively into future in their new family, thereby overlooking potential negative changes to their aspired identities. Such situations were unique because in-depth interviews, observations, informal sessions and traditional

elicitation methods failed to generate insight into their identity formation. Therefore, we realised the importance of providing them with a simulated and projective method to co-construct their transformative experience with them while enhancing their ability to reflect on and disclose their emotions and potential future practices (Rook, 2006).

Combining performative exercises (Foster, 2012) and elicitation tasks (Heisley & Levy, 1991) helped initiating discussions during such difficult situations. Learning from their previous interviews and drawing from first author's own interest in architectural software, we developed an exercise combining a computer-mediated home planning, constructing and furnishing activity combined with photo and video elicitation. This performative activity enabled us to jointly create an understanding of their identity re-formulation processes and provided them an opportunity to reflect on and interpret their potential behaviours in relation to building a new house. First, we asked the selected couples to design a portion of a house floor plan (including living room, kitchen, dining and master bedroom) using Autodesk-Homestyler software application in Windows 8. After constructing the floor plan they were asked to furnish a chosen floor area in their plan using the same application. After the sessions we had a semi-structured in-depth interview session where the couples explained their floor plans and furniture choices. We focused on topics such as why informants selected a specific floor plan and furniture, how they negotiated conflicting preferences, and how they envisioned their future lifestyle in this house. We also showed pictures of their favourite objects (from previous sessions) to initiate discussions about how they were going to display and use those possessions in their new home:

> I might bring my oil paintings or I might actually draw new ones. I can't bring those to his parents' house now and ask him to display those, right? But when we have a nice place, maybe I will ask him to put those up. (Female/Simulation and elicitation session)

These elicitations initiated interesting conversations about each other's preferences and needs and made these differences more explicit to each other, frequently, for the first time in their relationships.

> A library is a must because we both read. And I need an open plan kitchen and a living area. (Male/ House floor plan design activity)

> I don't mind an open plan. But my thing is, it has to be clean always. (Female/House floor plan design activity)

Such insight also became useful in future observations and interviews to generate further discussions through comparison with and reference to

contradictory behaviour. For example, one of the couple's parents was away for a couple of months on holiday and it challenged the young couple to manage household tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning and gardening while also taking care of their personal responsibilities. First, the insight gained from the simulation and elicitation tasks became useful when structuring the interviews and directing the informal sessions. Second, the understanding from the sessions also helped the couples to articulate changes more effectively explaining how their actual actions diverged from their initial expectations.

OVERCOMING ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

One of our earliest challenges was the inability to clearly define the research structure, data collection methods and data collection frequency primarily due to our emergent and adaptive research approach. Therefore, during the first meeting we informed participants about the adaptive nature of our research and of all the possible data collection methods. During the research, our first and the foremost important ethical objective was to remain honest and transparent throughout the research process. Whenever we wanted to integrate new methods during the adaptation process and use such data in the interpretation, we sought separate permission from informants by explaining to them the details of the process. Particularly, when using personal details obtained during informal sessions we were additionally cautious about the context within which such information was gathered. For example, as our friendships with some informants developed, it was normal for them to confide their personal details (especially female informants) with the first author's wife. Even though such insight naturally gave the first author an understanding of informants' deep emotions, we considered the fact that such information was too sensitive to be integrated in the data representation process as they were revealed on the context of a close friendship, rather than part of a research. In addition, by using member checks as an important ethical procedure (Kozinets, 2006), we attempted to overcome potential misinterpretations of recorded material, especially in relation to online resources. It provided informants an opportunity to view, control and give additional feedback about their material before they became part of the final research presentation.

During the data collection we confronted ethical challenges especially regarding the 'public vs. private' debate of online material (Langer &

Beckman, 2005). As argued by Baker (2013) interpretive researchers have an ethical responsibility to make informants aware of the lack of privacy especially in social media networks such as Facebook when conducting research. Therefore, in addition to obtaining informants' permission to be 'friends' on Facebook and making them aware of how we will collect data from their online activities, we also treated their Facebook profiles and timelines as their private space (as suggested by Kozinets, 2002). We also sought separate permission for, and made them aware of every status update, conversation and picture that was downloaded during the research. We also informed participants of the potential uses of their Facebook material and provided them an opportunity to negotiate how we would use whenever such information became important contributions to the presentation of the research.

Even though we did not set out to make close friendships during the data collection we realised the importance of building close relationships with participants in order to get as close as possible to meanings in their everyday practices in the Sri Lankan cultural context. However, as much as it was useful to the richness of our research, it also challenged us during the triangulation and interpretation by blurring the informant-researcher relationship and by creating a researcher-as-friend relationship (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014). There were occasions that the first author almost felt like he was dissecting the personal lives and private relationships of close friends, which advocated us to find a balance between preserving privacy and self-respect of informants and ensuring richness and depth of interpretation. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggested, having good insider knowledge of the research context and common sense in personal relationships are indispensable during such complex situations.

Building friendships with research informants also entailed the risk of 'crossing boundaries' (Smith, Allen-Collinson, Phoenix, Brown, & Sparkes, 2009). Even though in our Sri Lankan context, friendships were essential to gain rich insight into informants' personal lives, it also carried the risk of endangering the trust in our relationships. As Owton and Allen-Collinson (2014) posited, building friendships with informants does not necessarily mean over empathising with informants and completely merging with them. On the contrary, researcher and informant must remain two different social actors, but not necessarily apart from each other. We often discussed such critical and sensitive ethical implications with the group of our researchers. As Sherry (2006) suggested, having a multi-cultural and bi-gendered research team enabled us to view such implications using several lenses and became invaluable when deciding the balance between privacy and richness.

For example, during later stages of the study, one of the informant couples approached the first author to request financial assistance to attend some of their immediate needs a few months after the wedding. From the friendship perspective it would have been justifiable to accommodate such a request. However, after deliberating, we decided not to accommodate such requests, establishing an understanding of 'how close is too close' and defining the boundaries of the researcher-as-friend relationship (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In this paper we presented an example of how to adapt an ethnographic research approach by integrating multiple research methods, and how it enables us to overcome complexities of meanings inherent in cultural, mundane and personal identity re-formation processes. In this example, we discussed how our relationship with informants gradually developed during the longitudinal (and continuous) immersion using multiple layers of engagement, such as participant observations, in-depth interviews, Facebook interactions and adaptations of performative elicitation tasks. We demonstrated how trust and confidence were gradually constructed during the ethnographic adaptation process. We also elaborated how adapting ethnography shifted the informant-researcher relationship towards a researcher-as-friend relationship, allowing us to capture potentially 'private' consumption practices.

The premise of this study is that, trust between researchers and their informants, is critical to obtaining rich ethnographic data, and that this trust (and rich data) is best achieved through deep immersion by carefully and creatively adapting ethnographic approaches in response to contextual and methodological implications. Therefore, drawing from a longitudinal ethnographic research study where developing close friendships was essential to gain access, sustain immersion and create richness, we demonstrated how flexibility and creativity during on-going field work enable ethnographic researchers, who are exploring complex research topics, to gain trust and build confidence of their informants. Even though the benefits of potential ethnographic research tools are well documented in ethnographic texts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Mariampolski, 2006) and examples (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), we are contributing to the gap in current ethnographic research about how

ethnographic adaptation actually happens in the field. Therefore, we drew from a practical example to discuss how ethnographic researchers can recognise the need to integrate new tools, choose/develop new methods and adapt the chosen methods to suit the specific research context. We emphasised that, there are many ways to begin an ethnographic research project, there are also ways to evolve it by carefully and creatively integrating different research methods. We also provided insight into surprisingly gratifying outcomes of adapting ethnography, thereby providing an incentive for ethnographic researchers to remain flexible and creative during on-going field work. However, we highlighted that it is not the particular methods that we integrate that develop trust and comfort of informants, but the ways in which we adapt ethnography, drawing from the growing toolkit available to us.

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ONLINE RECEPTION ANALYSIS: BIG DATA IN QUALITATIVE MARKETING RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to forward an extension of reception analysis as a way to incorporate and give insight to social media mediations and big data in a qualitative marketing perspective. We propose a research method that focuses on discursive developments in consumer debates for example on YouTube – a large-scale open-access social media platform – as opposed to the closed and tightknit communities investigated by netnography.*

Methodology/approach – *Online reception analysis*

Findings – *Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, we find that big data can enrich online reception analyses by showing new aspects of weak tie online networks and consumers meaning making.*

Research limitations/implications – *The potential of online reception analysis is to encompass a discursive perspective on consumer interactions on large-scale open-access social media and to be able to analyze*

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socialities that do not represent shared cultures but are more representative of transitory everyday interactions.

Originality/value of paper – *Our method contributes to the current focus to define levels of analysis beyond research centered on individuals and individual interactions within groups to investigate other larger socialities. Further, our method also contributes by incorporating and investigating the mediatization of interaction that social media contributes with and therefore our methods actively work with the possibilities of social media. Hence, by extending the advances made by netnography into online spaces, online reception analysis can potentially inform the current status of big data research with a sociocultural methodological perspective.*

Keywords: Big data; online reception analysis; netnography; discourse analysis; Webometrics; YouTube

INTRODUCTION

Big data is the big issue in marketing at the moment. It is proclaimed to be the solution to end all marketing problems in the future (Manyika et al., 2011). Some even claim that with big data we can dispense with the "why" questions (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013), however others warn against trusting big data at the same time as they worry about the surveillance that big data also represents (Boyd & Crawford, 2011). In this paper, we investigate how big data can give perspective to analyses of consumers' interactions on large-scale open-access social media. They present a challenge to qualitative consumer research, because of the numbers of consumers interacting and their transitory engagement. YouTube users, for example, may be continuously present on YouTube, while engaging only temporarily with specific texts and other users, thus creating a different sociality than what is seen in small-scale closed social media communities such as brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Big data in this case provide data to understand forms of interaction, level of commitment, and common discourses, that would be hard to detect or interpret without the big data traces.

In qualitative marketing research the most widely adopted method for the study of consumers' meaning making activities online is netnography (Kozinets, 1998, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2009), which has provided the qualitative marketing literature with deep knowledge on co-creation (Füller,

Jawecki, & Mühlbacher, 2007; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008), anticonsumption (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998), global consumer citizenship (Rokka & Moisander, 2009), cross-cultural ambivalence (Nelson & Otnes, 2005), consumers' meaning making (Broderick, Mclaran, & Ma, 2003), peer to peer file sharing (Cohn & Vaccaro, 2006; Giesler & Pohlmann, 2003a, 2003b), and conflicts among consumers (de Valck, 2007). True to its ethnographic heritage, netnographic studies are focused on micro-textual analysis of closed communities with a group of core members who produce, share, maintain, and sustain a fairly coherent community culture with shared norms, rituals, narratives, and meanings (Goulding, 2005, p. 298). The focus on relatively demarcated communities makes perfect sense when employing the netnographic method, because as an extension of ethnography, the specificity of the particular community and its defining practices and community ties form the basis of understanding (Arnould, 1998; Kozinets, 1998, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2009).

However, there are many other types of online social contexts such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other large-scale open-access social media where consumers interact and make meaning. Here, consumers participate in high numbers in fleeting ways, but are nonetheless part of the meaning making processes around brands and ads, because they share and discuss for example TV commercials uploaded to YouTube. Further, due to the technological properties of the platforms, these comments, images, and consumer-made videos circulate not just within the platform but into other platforms such as Facebook and more closed platforms such as community networks, and in this fashion, these consumers, despite their low engagement, spread their viewpoints in large circles. Manuel Castells call these interactions and media convergences weak tie socialities (1996/2010, p. 388). Such weak tie socialities, – a characteristic of a global network society – are difficult to investigate with netnography, because they are not necessarily examples of community but rather mediated expressions of readings.

In this paper we propose to incorporate big data in online reception analyses to understand disparate consumers' online interactions and meaning making. The paper thus takes up Scott's consumer-response perspective on advertising (Scott, 1994a, 1994b, 2008, 2009) and is an example of how qualitative and quantitative methods can be mixed when incorporating big data in cultural analyses of large-scale open-access social media. The purpose is to give a qualitative perspective on big data and approach online consumer interactions and meaning making from a media sensitive perspective. The paper hence contributes by making methodological proposals to understand the "lived action"-perspective of the online every day, by decentering the

consumer subject as object of analysis and look at the fragmented everyday life (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Fiske, 1987/2011). Thus, a final contribution of this method is that it goes beyond consumer-centric interpretations, which is a recent concern within CCT-studies (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Moisander, Peñaloza, & Valtonen, 2009; Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009).

Inspired by Castells, we therefore suggest shifting the analytical focus from *users* to *uses* (1996/2010, p. 390) and thereby understand the accumulated patterns of behavior of weak tie socialities rather than specific communities' patterns. We argue for interpretative research at a discursive level, because, contrary to netnography's focus on types of users or types of communities, we suggest to focus on types of readings and patterns of response in a societal context, thereby moving the center of attention from the consumers alone to interplays of technology, texts, users, and contexts.

This paper is structured as follows; we analyze the differences between netnography and online reception analysis. Then we introduce the quantitative tool Webometric (Thelwall, 2008, 2009; Thelwall, Sud, & Vis, 2012) as a way to sort and classify big social media data and understand consumer networks, in order to find and qualitatively analyze smaller illuminating cases from a discourse analysis perspective (Elliott, 1996; Fairclough, 2003; Hackley, 2003) that enables understanding of how flows of meaning emerge from different kinds of data. Finally, we demonstrate the possibilities of this type of analysis in an example of four car TV commercials on YouTube.

ONLINE CONSUMPTION CULTURE – SOCIAL SPACE OR MEDIA SPACE

The interpretive turn in consumer culture research (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Goulding, 1999) facilitated much needed investigations of consumers' experiences and meaning making primarily from either psychological (Tadajewski, 2006) or ethnographic (Sherry, 1991) perspectives, which have provided CCT research with many new insights into the lived lives of consumers and their meaning making processes (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). The interpretive methods have developed with the field and have also expanded into new contexts with developments of the Internet and later social media. Especially Kozinets' work has made significant advances in the CCT and marketing literature on to how to approach online

social and cultural life with the development of the netnographic method (Kozinets, 1997, 2002, 2006a, 2009). However, netnography forwards a micro-textual analytical perspective focused on small portions of devoted consumers' online interactions and meaning making in closed communities.

The focus of netnographic analysis is a priori on cultural interpretation, that is on particular online communities as existing accessible social worlds (Kozinets, 2009, p. 132), where real people negotiate identity, symbolic systems, and relationships. Netnography accordingly produces understandings of online culture and communities as they appear in their online naturalistic setting (Kozinets, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2006b, 2009). Thus, netnography has declared the Internet to be a social space (Hine, 2005). It follows that to netnography, culture is culture whether it is online or offline, and in most cases, online culture is primarily an extension of offline culture to encompass geographically dispersed consumers (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Kozinets, 1997, 2001, 2009; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Assuming that the Internet is primarily a social space, however, leaves out other perspectives such as the Internet as forms of meta-mediated communication (Jensen, 2011) that encompass multiple forms of media and layers of mediation, where technology sometimes have agentic capacities (Franklin & Graesser, 1997) that influence interpretive as well as social actions.

In netnographic investigations, agency as well as meaning belong to people in communities. So meaning is there in an almost tangible way, and there are right and wrong ways to interpret meaning both for community members and for the researcher. It is, for instance, possible to go back to the informants to perform member checks to find out if the netnographic researcher got it right and to give the informants voice as part of the research (Kozinets, 1997, p. 471, 1998, p. 369, 2002, p. 67, 2006b, p. 136, 2009, p. 148). Further, the community members are the keys to investigating meaning about for example the brands that brand community literature investigates (Cova & Pace, 2006; Fournier, McAlexander, Schouten, Sensiper, & Corporation, 2000; Kates, 2006; Luedicke, 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz & Schau, 2005; Schau & Muñiz, 2007; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009), contrary to the brand itself (Bjerrisgaard, Kjeldgaard, & Bengtson, 2012; Lury, 2009) or the medium through which meaning is articulated by the consumer (Jensen, 1990, p. 143; Schrøder, 1994, p. 339).

However, large-scale open-access social media platforms where large amounts of data are generated as a result of social meaning making based on fleeting and weak social ties require new methodological approaches that go beyond understanding consumer sociality as primarily organized through close-knit communities. Social life in large-scale open-access online

media is based on fleeting interaction, yet pervasive in its distribution, and further, it represents fragmented social interactions, yet forms coherent and contestable norms and meanings. Large numbers of users participate in minor ways and these forms of participation reaches into other platforms. Further, on YouTube, contradictions and disagreement are the norms that enable sharing and collaboration (Chmiel et al., 2011; Thelwall et al., 2012; van Zoonen, Vis, & Mihelj, 2011), contrary to closed communities, where contradictions and disagreement are threats to community (de Valck, 2007). Finally, YouTube engenders such vast numbers of users, videos, comments, and (dis)likes that it challenges the *assimilative practice* (Kozinets, 2009, p. 59) of a nethnographer.

Online Social Media as Mediated Space

A reception perspective focuses on more than interpersonal interactions in a community, because it is about mediated texts, the response they get from users, and how the users' media practices play into their interpretive activities (Jensen, 2007). Thus, we suggest to approach large-scale open-access social media platforms as a priori mediated spaces; for example, users only have access to them via media technology such as computers or mobile phones.

A central aspect in reception studies is technology's mediation and users' technological manipulations of texts and how texts and their reception changes based on technology's intermediation (Castells, 1996/2010). This means that the concept of text is opened up in an online reception perspective, because the analytical text is a wide variety of constellations, where texts and users are just two aspects, and where technology is always an aspect as well. Thus, reception studies operate at a discursive level and investigates patterns of response (Schrøder, Drotner, Kline, & Murray, 2003, p. 116) and their situatedness in larger social discourses. Consequently, reception studies also aim at showing the dynamics of interpretations and how interpretations feed into textual and societal discourses and enforces or changes them.

Data

Linda Scott conceptualized reception studies as consumer-response in 1994. As interpretive research it draws on the same methods as netnography, and an entire reception study can sometimes be based on one person's

interpretations of a text – typically the researcher's (Scott, 1990, 1994a, 1994b, 2008). Yet, other consumer-response studies adopt an empirical base, where both interviews (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998; Kates & Shaw-Garlock, 1999; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999, 2003; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Scott & Vargas, 2007) and experiments (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999, 2003; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004; Scott & Vargas, 2007) have been utilized. However, the data resulting from these methods are at a discursive level and therefore focus on how the interpretation is situated in a wider interpretive community (Fish, 1976, 1978). Thus, reception studies approach a different analytical level than netnography's micro-textual level, since it represents not only the individual's phenomenological context and how the interpretation is situated in that context, but also includes historical, social, technological, and textual contexts.

The different levels of analysis between netnography and reception studies also mean that the employment of quantitative methods results in data that have different interpretive potential. Thus, for reception studies, quantitative data is one way of moving from a micro-textual analytical level to a discursive analytical level. Therefore, part of a reception analysis is to make sense of consumers' media use and media interpretations by accumulating consumer responses (Wilson, 2009, p. 4). And to that end big data becomes a valuable part of the analysis, because of it accumulative character (Mayer-Schönberge & Cukier, 2013).

Theory Building

Reception studies build theory about the connections between texts, users, technology, and context in a wider sense. From a reception studies perspective, a different understanding of meaning emerges in reading processes between text and reader (Livingstone, 1993, p. 7), based on collective conventions of textual forms and readings of these forms (Scott, 1994a, p. 463). So rather than culture and interpretations of culture, the focus for reception studies is on processes of interpretation and how these interpretations originate both in texts, consumers and media practices. As a consequence, meaning as one unified community-reified entity is not a concept within consumer-response (Scott, 1994a, p. 463). Rather, meaning is a matter of literacy and context (Livingstone, 2008), and not only the literacy of the text, but also of social interpretive interactions and the media technology employed by the text or the reader in the interpretive moment (Livingstone, 2004). That is, an advertisement that is viewed on TV at home

in the living room can be interpreted in a different way than when viewed on YouTube or Facebook by the same person, and the addition of more people adds more ways of reading. Thus, context in consumer-response is something quite different than the particular community context investigated by netnography, where meanings particular to that community can be experienced and understood (Kozinets, 2006b, p. 133). In reception studies, context can be approached from more interpretive levels; it can be within the text as the contextualizing of a rhetorical trope (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2008, p. 9) or the historical context of an ad (Scott, 2008, p. 299). Thus, context is both constructed and given and therefore also influencing and influenced by a given text's *intentions and outcomes* (Scott, 2008, p. 299).

ONLINE RECEPTION ANALYSIS BY WAY OF BIG DATA

In the following we present the sketch of an online reception analysis that employs big data via YouTube to show how big data can be a way to methodologically show the larger context of the qualitatively analyzed discourses. The analysis builds on the comments to four American car ads from spring 2012. The ads follow up on Chrysler's Superbowl ad *Its halftime in America* featuring Clint Eastwood. The four follow-ups each promote a different Chrysler brand; the Dodge Challenger, the Ram Pickup Truck, the Jeep Wrangler, and the Chrysler 300. On YouTube, however, they are all part of the Chrysler channel, and they were all launched on March 30, 2012. The collective theme of the ads is to overcome the financial crisis through hard work, pulling together, and resilience. The ads and their intertextual relationship are described in the appendix.

Since this paper is meant as a demonstration of the digital consumer-response and how to build an analysis from quantitative and qualitative methods, we only demonstrate aspects of the analyses and of the material. Thus, this analysis cannot be considered complete or exhaustive, it is intended as an example of how big data can deepen a qualitative online reception analysis.

Cybermetrics

A cybermetric search can via its analysis of big data give an idea of the patterns of response and networks that the videos are part of. Using

Webometric, developed by Mike Thelwall (Prabowo & Thelwall, 2009; Thelwall, 2009; Thelwall, Buckley, & Paltoglou, 2011, 2012; Thelwall et al., 2012; Thelwall & Wilkinson, 2010), it is possible through big data repositories around the ads to get insight into relationships among users that can otherwise be discovered only by the work-intensive processes of going through the individual users and their friends lists. Webometric enables the collection of Applications Program Interface (API), that is code that give access to information the users have shared on their channels, such as gender, age, and nationality. In this case, we use a purposive sample, having preselected the four *Halftime in America* ads, however, Webometric can also be used to sample videos on certain topics in a grounded way through thematic searches (Thelwall, 2009; Thelwall et al., 2012).

Using the videos' URLs, Webometric can do a combined search of the four videos and thereby show who replies to the videos, indicate YouTube connections between users of one or more ads such as friends and channels subscriptions, generate lists of the topics discussed, and help create central statistics about the videos and its consumers. Finally, Webometric can generate visual networks of connections and show the comments that connect users around a video. In doing so, Webometric enables subsequent qualitative analyses of the quantitative data, because it shows connections in data and preserves the qualitative aspects such as users and comments in contexts.

Metrics of the "It's Halftime in America" Campaign

The data were all downloaded on July 28, 2012. We have selected four examples where specific user comments work as nodes attracting other comments; the users are fullblastman, goodwifeweaver, smithras09, and jmorris6758, see Figs. 1–3. The networks are based on comments, and next to them are the exchanges in writing. Furthermore, the diagram shows username, age, and gender if the user has revealed the information on their channel.

The networks of comments show the discussions as they unfold in relation to the ads and users. However, in order to get more insight for the later qualitative analysis, it may be relevant to know whether the commenting users know each other beforehand, or whether they share interests, as indicated by for example shared subscriptions. Further, it is possible to draw networks of friendships between users, and of friends in common, but in this case, none of the users are friends on YouTube, nor do they share

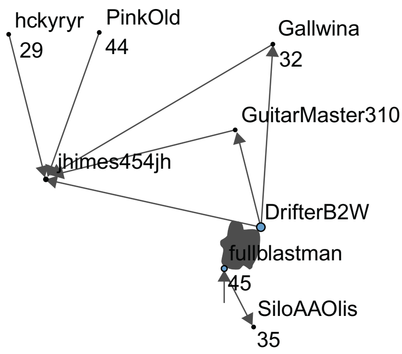

Fig. 1. Network Associated with fullblastman.

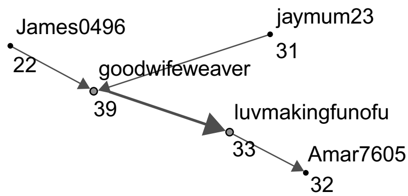

Fig. 2. Network Associated with goodwifeweaver.

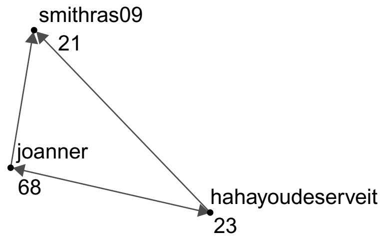

Fig. 3. Network Associated with smithras09.

friends there. Further, they do not subscribe to each other's channels. They do, however, share interests in one visible way, namely that they subscribe to the same channels – just not each other's. Fig. 4 shows how relations are drawn as a network of subscriptions-in-common.

The users share subscriptions with other users, but of the selected representative users, goodwifeweaver shares only one subscription with the other

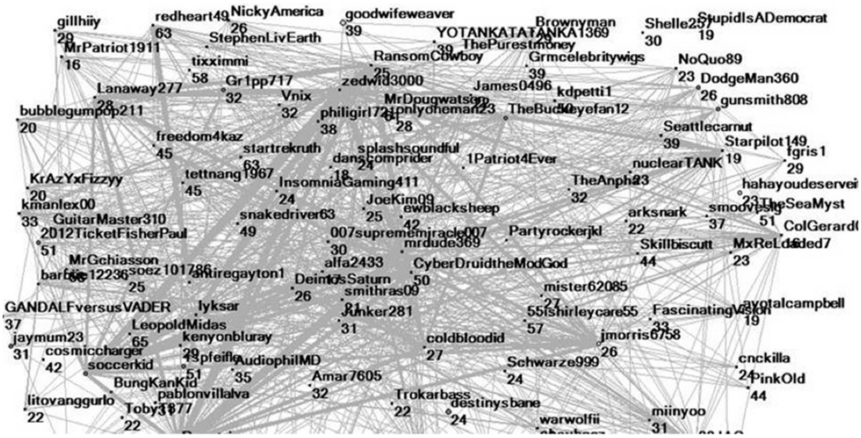

Fig. 4. Excerpts of Subscription-in-Common Network.

users with whom she is engaged in conversation. Smithras09 and jmorris 6758 do not share any subscriptions with the users with whom they discuss, although they share many subscriptions with other commentators. Finally, fullblastman shares no subscriptions with any of the other commentators around these four ads. Consequently, if the users know each other, their connections are not visible on YouTube, and they do not make a point of recognizing each other on YouTube. Nevertheless, the conversations seem to unfold mainly within an American context. Out of all the users who comment on these four videos and list their nationality, only 42 are not Americans, and out of the 42 non-US commentators, 17 are from Canada. This is not surprising, however, since the ads are directed at an American audience and circulate on American TV. Thus, media convergence facilitates the congregation of American users around the ads (Jenkins, 2006). Compared to the general population on YouTube, the almost exclusively American audience is skewed, because American users make up approximately 35.6 % of YouTube's population (Thelwall et al., 2012, p. 8). Arguably, many users do not register any information about their age, gender, or location; these statistics can therefore only be taken as indicative, as is any use of big data (Boyd & Crawford, 2011; Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). Further, users who do not comment are not part of the statistics and are as a consequence invisible to the analysis.

The users address each other across age and gender; smithras09 is 21 and male and is addressed by Joanner, who is 68 and female. The other

sample users are engaged in less diverse conversations, when it comes to age diversity, but still display variations in age and gender (Fig. 5). The users' age and gender differences may be part of the explanation for their lack of shared subscriptions; at least the diagram of shared subscriptions suggests a correlation between age and shared subscriptions.

The youngest users are 15 and male, and the oldest user is 68 and female. Of the users that have revealed their gender (and assuming they have told the truth), 18% are females and 82% males. Furthermore, the predominant age groups are between 20 and 29 years old. This may not be surprising, since the ads in this sample are all car ads, but it is also consistent with previous research on YouTube. Thus, Thelwall et al. found that when gender was recorded, three-quarters of the YouTube users were males, and the most common age was 20 (Thelwall et al., 2012, p. 7). In relation to the half-time ads, the women who have recorded their age are generally older than the males. The female average age is 42, with users ranging from 22 to 68.

In this instance, at least two aspects are suggestive of the over-representation of young males among the commentators. Firstly, the commercials mainly address males, due to the products they advertise, and the characters in the commercial are mostly men, thereby suggesting that male audiences more readily identify with the characters in the ads. Secondly, the overarching themes of recession and job markets in the commercials are acutely more relevant to the male audience of twentysomethings because they have a higher risk of unemployment and job loss as a result of the recession. Furthermore, according to the American Bureau of Labor, the recession has had wider implications for males between 16 and 24 than for other groups (Bureau of Labor, 2012). However, this is only speculation, as the quantitative data does not offer information about this.

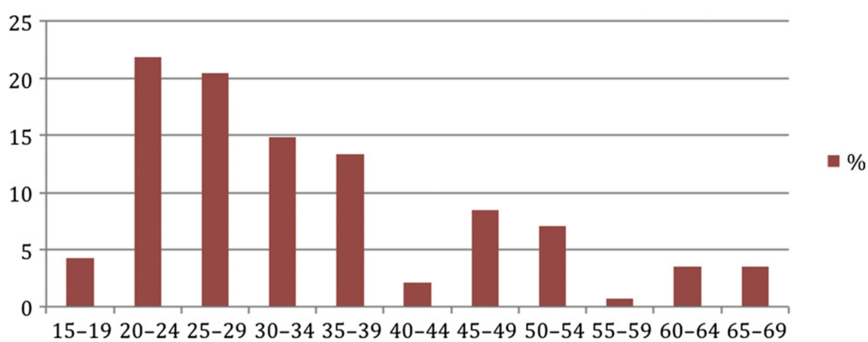

Fig. 5. Age Distribution among Commentators.

The analysis of some of the big data provides us with an overall understanding of who are present in these comments and the social composition in the conversations. It is important to underline that the way we approach big data is not as correlations as Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013). Rather, we use big data to identify consumer actions that would otherwise be hard to detect. Thus, with these quantitative patterns in place, we suggest returning to the comments and videos to develop the qualitative perspective.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

To get a better understanding of the comments and thereby the response to the ads, we carried out discourse analyses of the commentaries. Discourse analysis is particularly suited for analyzing the intertextual relationship between big and small discourses (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 102, 1992b, p. 195). That is, discourse analysis situates texts within big Discourse, because any text draws on and interacts with Big Discourses in society. Netnography sometimes also uses discourse analysis (Kozinets, Maclaran, Hogg, & Catterall, 2003; Maclaran, Hogg, Catterall, & Kozinets, 2004). However, the differences in epistemology between netnography and discourse analysis is a challenge when combing these methods. The issue lies in their emic and etic approaches, respectively (Pike, 1967). Netnography works from the inside and attempts to see culture from the perspective of the insider (Kozinets, 2009, p. 60). Accordingly, the connection between small discourse and big discourse is difficult, if working from a netnographic perspective (Maclaran et al., 2004, p. 164) because the micro-social perspective regards discourses as emerging, whereas Big Discourse generally involves prior understandings of the phenomenon (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000, p. 1134). Discourse analysis, on the other hand, views culture as a dialectic between structure and agency (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 45). Thus, discourse analysis is a *"top-down" way of seeing* (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 226). However, in this paper we forwards the perspective that big and small discourse-flows are not contradictory, but complementary, because from a consumer response perspective, the context is always the wider society, and therefore Big Discourses are always also part of the small micro-level discourses. In the following, we develop an example of how big and small discourses interact in one of the commentaries and show how mediation is part of the interaction.

Discourses of Recession

The following quote has been retrieved using Webometric, but we also recommend going through parts of the data manually. Webometric generates networks based on exchanges, so comments not posted as replies will not appear in the commentator network. This creates a particular bias since the exchanges on YouTube are often motivated by disagreements (Thelwall et al., 2012, p. 12), as are exchanges in general on large-scale open-access social media (Chmiel et al., 2011, p. 4). However, many positive statements may disappear completely from the analysis if only the comments in the Webometric network are considered. Therefore, we study the commentary perusing both the network analyses and as they appear online to ensure that the analyses encompass both isolated statements and exchanges.

Below is an example of an argument between five users that appeared as comments to the Dodge variation of the *Halftime in America* theme.

> jmorris6758: Here's the thing people: The recession has been over for a while now, and the economy has improved. The main problem with most of us is not that we can't find a job, its that we are not willing to move past our old careers and start a career in a different field. Let's face it, this recession didn't just cause unemployment, it destroyed job fields that will never come back because employers saw that cutting them was a good idea and decided not to bring them back.
>
> AroundSun -> jmorris6758: The recession is not over, I don't know what you are thinking or where you are getting your info from. We are pursuing the same policies that caused the disaster in the first place. We put a bandaid on a bullet wound and treated some symptoms but not the disease itself. Not only is it not over, it is going to get worse. Even if we discontinue current policies, we are going to have to take our lumps first like we should have 5 years ago, before the situation ever improves.
>
> jmorris6758 -> AroundSun: You saying the recession is not over is like saying global warming is not real. You state no facts yet facts back my claim up. Your opinion is not what is counted, but it is dully noted ….
>
> miinyoo -> jmorris6758: There's a large swath of reasons this isn't accurate. While the rationale for it is very reasonable, there are deeper issues. Without trust, the economy cannot function and the only reason there is any trust at all is the Fed. Artificial trust. That can't go on forever. Something has to give. Until confidence is restored and the debt/fraud/criminality rectified, things will be glum and new hugely expensive ventures to produce new capital and quality jobs will stay rather scarce.
>
> Roberta Ross -> jmorris6758: You are so right! When I lost my job of 10 years with a $55,000.00 salary, I looked for work & found a black hole. So I willingly took a job at $8.75 an hour, 15 hours a week, a year later I am a supervisor up to $10.00 and 25 a week, split shifts are great I get to drive all the way home and back in between my shifts. I have 2 other "occasional" jobs. Aug. I close on my shortsale & moving myself

> into a friends basement. Last night I dreamed I was balling my eyes out, but things are really great
>
> bettergetdave -> jmorris6758: I couldn't disagree with you more. Which job fields did employers see as good to get rid of and they wouldn't come back? PS love the commerical even though it's from Dodge.

The quotes display very little information about the ad. In fact, only the first user, jmorris6758, comments on the overall theme of the ads; that because of the recession, positive American values must be emphasized and examples of good civic behavior saluted. jmorris6758 further contradicts the campaign message by stating that the recession has been over for a while, and that people have to change their expectations to the job market, because the job market has changed. The other users join the conversation to debate jmorris6758's statement from various perspectives. Aroundsun disagrees with the statement for political reasons and calls for a profound change of the political and economic systems. Miinyoo also expresses political disagreement, but points to a fundamental lack of trust in American society, which has to be rebuilt in order to restore civil society. Roberta Ross at first seems to agree with the initial statement, but then goes on to share her personal story of how she lost her job and now juggles three unstable jobs while living in a friend's basement. Her final remark – dreaming that she is balling her eyes out, but things are great – adds a satirical twist to her story, and thus her comment challenges jmorris6758's statement about people not adapting to the new job market. Finally, bettergetdave asks jmorris6758 to qualify his statement with examples of job fields that were consciously selected to be disposed of. bettergetdave is the only one of the users in the exchange that actually mentions the ad, yet the ad is the initiating cause of the argument between the users.

The users have gathered to see the ads and have subsequently been motivated by the user comments to debate. The ads' presence on YouTube has facilitated the users' coming together to debate the campaign statement. And the statement in this case is not about whether or not to buy the car advertised nor is it about the narrative of the commercial. Rather, the users debate the call of the overall campaign to pull together and follow the solid, dependable, hardworking, sacrificing people in the ads. In doing so, the campaign is trying to be a positive factor in the US recession-ridden society, yet the YouTube-users are not necessarily agreeing with the campaign statement, and they use their access to digital media platforms to debate.

Additionally, the example shows that the users may not be supportive consumers of the brand but can still appreciate the message of the commercial. bettergetdave's comment, that the ad is good even if it is from Dodge, shows a critical consumer reading because the user differentiates between the brand and the ad. While the user does not seem ready to act on the selling proposition to buy a Challenger forwarded by the ad, the comment shows appreciation for the ad narrative. Further, the comment points to how ads become social texts rather than persuasive texts (Ritson & Elliott, 1999; Scott, 1994a, 1994b) because the users to a large degree ignore the persuasive message and use the ads for debates about recession and job-market.

In this analysis, we see how big data can be a tool to show the resonance board of the qualitative analysis because big data in this case is a way to demonstrate the way big, and small discourses are negotiated and expressed around particular ads and users. The users' digital media practice further their interaction and participation in both small and big discourse because the linkages between lived lives, institutional discourses, and ad response become visible in the comments on YouTube. The Webometric analysis further shows that these users most likely have no previous engagements with each other, so the debate that emerges between the users is not a reenactment of familiar statements from a closed circle of users but a resemblance of the debate that takes place in society about the current recession. Yet, the Webometric analysis also reveals that not all parts of American society participate in the debate; those engaged on YouTube are mainly males in their twenties. Thus, structures of silence are also part of the online reception analysis, since it is possible to point to missing segments and voices in the analysis. Thus, a central point of the analysis is to understand the various segments and subdivisions that make up the mass audience on YouTube, however, not from a community perspective, rather we look at users as audiences and analyze their comments as their public and collective interpretation of media (Castells, 1996/2010, p. 363).

DISCUSSION

Big data in this case gives a way to understand whom the responses come from and what their connections are, therefore big data give direction to the online reception analysis. The initial description of the ad campaign develops the textual framework that the ads belong to and the users

comment on, but it also connects the campaign to Chrysler's current situation in American society. The Webometric analysis develops the social demographics and possible user networks in the comments. It indicates who are present in the comments and points to patterns of response. Thus, the cybermetrics show that the dominant users are young American males and that despite their lack of prior connections they are keen to debate the underlying economic and political discourse of the ad campaign. Young men are a particularly difficult group to engage through broadcast media; however on YouTube they become visible as a critical audience and interact as a weak tie public inspired by the ads. As such, Webometric maps the debate and helps connect the statements analyzed in the discourse analysis to users. This is of course only possible in the cases where the users have revealed information about themselves on YouTube. Finally, the discourse analysis demonstrates the issues and discourse that are important to the users and how they use the ads to create a space where it is possible to share their viewpoints and discuss current societal issues. The discourse analysis also confirms that the users are critical and aware of the ads' intended message, and that they are capable of ignoring that message and using the advertising text for their own social purposes.

Through the combination of big data and online reception analysis the connections between interpretation as a social practice and the pervasiveness of these social practices become apparent. In this case, the online reception analysis shows that concerned consumers use their digital media practices to discuss and question societal discourses, and that ads as a pervasive cultural form (Kenney & Scott, 2003; Scott, 1994a) facilitate these consumer discussions because they work as textual nodes that inspire consumers to interact. Big data further provide the accumulative data to show the generalizability of the online reception analysis. Through the combination of the big data mapping and the qualitative analyses of discourses in the comments it becomes possible to show the socialities emerging through the weak tie interactions (Castells, 1996/2010) on YouTube.

Furthermore, the combination of big data and online reception analysis shows new aspects of consumer responses to ads. That is, users on YouTube are not necessarily invested in brands or products as for example members of brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) or consumption tribes (Canniford, 2011a, 2011b; Cova, 1997; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007) are. Reception analyses focus on any constellation that includes consumers and texts, because they are not concerned with whether or not there is a consumption relationship. Through a reception approach, readers of

texts are neither consumers, anticonsumers, or indifferent. They are people interpreting texts in certain contexts.

The particular audience that is identified through our analysis are younger American men. This group is often elusive as mass media audience, because they to a large extent have moved from broadcast media to online forms of media. Yet, through our reception analysis we are able to identify them as an audience via their uses of online texts and technologies. Moreover, we can develop an understanding of their investment in societal debates, that they often are not seen participating in via traditional forms of media (Connell, 2005; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Thus, a benefit from combining a reception perspective with big data is that the idea of who makes meaning through ads is widened from the consumers who are positively or negative invested in the particular brand, product, or service, to everybody encountering the ad online. For an online reception analysis, big data provide a way to show more analytical perspectives and include more aspects of data. The possibilities of handling big data as part of the analysis are to widen the understanding of who can be valuable informants, because the mapping of consumer-responses shows how, for example, YouTube users voluntarily and on an everyday basis interact critically with advertising texts. Through the large quantities of data, it is possible to connect different levels of discourse and thereby show how everyday ad response is influenced by "Big Discourse" such as Economy, Politics, and Nation.

Thus, we argue that the combination of big data in quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis helps us approach the weak tie socialities in a holistic and contextual way (Jick, 1979). That is, through the combination of methods and data accumulation, we are able to point out new forms of interaction and different audiences on YouTube. Without the big data perspective, we would not be able to discuss the pervasiveness of the qualitatively identified behavior, and vice versa, without the qualitative analysis we would be unable to discuss the depth of the user-developed discourses and pervasiveness of user activities.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we show that online reception analysis is a way to approach large-scale open-access social media platforms and understand consumers' interpretive activities on such platforms. Through both quantitative and qualitative analyses, we show how big data can be used in a qualitative

marketing research perspective to open up our understanding of users and texts and how they interact on and through digital media. The aim of this research is different from netnography's blueprint of a specific community culture, and online reception analyses embark on different forms of analyses, even if the methods of data collections employed are largely the same as those used in netnography. One might argue that where netnography's focus on communities exhibit the traits of modern forms of "the social," fleeting and ephemeral social interactions on large-scale open-access social media represent postmodern forms of sociality (Maffesoli, 1996). That is, the weak tie forms of sociality characterized by Castells as *the new electronic culture* (1996/2010, p. 397). The method we propose here can be said to be a way to grasp such fleeting forms of sociality by way of analyzing big data. The type of big data we focus on are a form of digital material traces of such weak tie forms of sociality.

The combination of big data and consumer-response provides perspectives on processes of interpretation, textual flows, and embeddedness of big and small discourses in everyday interpretation of ads. As such, it delineates the ways digital media practices are part of the interpretive activities that consumers engage in, for example on YouTube. Thus, big data and consumer-response pinpoints the ways in which small and large communities are connected through structures of text, interpretations, and technology, and offers a way to conceptualize these connections.

That is, we propose to engage with big data as a possibility to get access to the everyday, transitory consumer activities with texts and technology that are difficult to hold on to from a qualitative perspective because of their ephemeral character. Big data is then a repository of consumer interactions and can be viewed as traces of a different kind of sociality. Thus, by looking beyond the immediate text-reader relationship, online reception analysis enables research that situates consumers, texts, and technologies in larger societal frameworks. Our paper demonstrates one way to develop further the advances made in qualitative marketing research by netnography into the online spaces. Thus, online reception analysis can potentially contribute to the current status of big data analysis to incorporate qualitative, culturally based insights.

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APPENDIX: THE INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP OF THE ADS

It's halftime in America is a campaign launched by Chrysler during Super Bowl 2012, later expanded with four commercials all promoting different Chrysler brands. The campaign is intended to motivate Americans to move forward in troubled times, and to offer hope and encouragement. The first commercial, It's halftime in America, featured Clint Eastwood and became the theme of a political discussion initiated by Karl Rove, former adviser to the Bush administration, who asserted the viewpoint that the commercial was promoting Obama's reelection. The commercial promotes Chrysler as an all-American company that fights alongside with the Americans to turn the current economic crisis around. And in fact, Chrysler has, as most American car companies, received subsidies from the American government to overcome the crisis. However, that aspect is only an implicit part of the commercial, as the commercial displays images of ordinary Americans trying to make ends meet and work their way through the crisis. Clint Eastwood is the node that keeps the various images together. Through a montage between Americans and Eastwood as the quintessential American, he narrates a story of how it is time to pull together and meet the challenges of recession face on. Thus, the commercial presents discourses of crisis, nation, and markets.

The initial Superbowl commercial is the overarching textual context of these four ads, and as such facilitates connections between the texts. All the commercials have been developed together and shot at the same time. It's halftime in America includes footage from the other commercials and works as meta-text, which includes the other four commercials in it. The Superbowl commercial therefore functions as a framework for the interpretation of the other ads, and even if the recession for example is never mentioned in the four subsequent ads, the theme is already part of their soundboard, because it has been introduced in It's halftime in America.

Shaun in the Challenger: tells the story of a father who has served in the army and been away from his family. As he is now back with his family, he reflects on the sacrifices his family has made while he was away. Especially the son has stepped up and never complained, even if he missed his dad. Now the father gets to drive his son to school, and the ride provides many a father and son moment for the two. The spot is intended to celebrate family values and American military actions for freedom.

Jenny in the Jeep Wrangler: the story of Jenny is about a family that has split up, and mother and children have moved away to begin again. The daughter in the family tells the story, and as she complains about the changes that have happened, she also acknowledges their mother's hard work to navigate their new circumstances and make a comfortable home for them. Once again, the ride to school is the time when the mother and children share some family time together and come to terms with their new situation. The ad is meant to inspire perseverance and reinvention of oneself. And maybe this is Chrysler's way of justifying their repositioning of Jeep Wrangler toward women, even if Jeep usually has had a solid consumer-base among twenty year-old males.

Chrysler 300 – my son Steve: This ad is once again the story told by a father, although this time the story is about an adult son and the father's pride of the son's accomplishments. The son has his own company, and through hard work and just enough risk-taking, he has managed to build a solid business over thirty years. The father, who narrates the story, shares his feelings of having brought up a sensible and self-made man. The intention behind the story is to inspire big dreams and the desire to make your own way in the world.

Tommy and the RAM: finally, Tom and the RAM is told by a wife, who shares her love for her hardworking husband. As images pass of the husband working at all hours, the wife recounts his determination and dedication to provide for the family. We are let in on how she leaves encouraging messages for him on his answering machine to help him keep up his spirits. The commercial is intended to express perseverance and commitment.

None of the stories directly addresses the American economy or the difficult times the country is going through at the moment; however, because of the intertextual connection to the more elaborate Superbowl ad, recession is the underlying premise of the stories.

NORTH AND SOUTH: SPECIAL SESSIONS ON REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The following two chapters summarize the presentations of two special-topic conference sessions focusing on regional perspectives of consumer culture. Special sessions such as these do not produce completed papers but, instead, talk from research that may be completed or in progress.

The chapter "Nordic Consumer Culture: Context and Concept" takes on consumption from a decidedly Nordic standpoint. Specific topics include the welfare state, egalitarianism, gender equality, and consensus building as forces that inflect Nordic consumer culture.

The chapter "The Branded and Gendered Brazilian Body: Material and Symbolic Constructions in an Overlooked Context" takes us into the Global South and examines embodied consumption through Brazilian eyes. Brazilian ideals of body, beauty, gender, and brand are traced to colonial precursors, beach cultures, and the embrace of plasticity in various senses of the word.

NORDIC CONSUMER CULTURE: CONTEXT AND CONCEPT

Per Østergaard, Jeppe Trolle Linnet,
Lars Pynt Andersen, Dannie Kjeldgaard,
Stine Bjerregaard, Henri Weijo, Diane M. Martin,
John W. Schouten and Jacob Östberg

Keywords: Nordic; consumer culture; egalitarian; welfare state; glocalization

INTRODUCTION

Per Østergaard

Theories of consumer culture are most often rooted in Northern American cultural contexts. A high level of stratification, social differentiation and individually autonomous agents typically characterizes these cultural contexts. In recent years there have been some efforts to develop more localized theoretical conceptualizations of consumer culture theory (e.g., Brown, 2006; Cova & Cova, 2002). While different in their histories and bearing all the specificities of being particular cultural contexts,

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the particular socio-historic milieu of the Nordic countries has shaped a specific rendition of a glocal (global–local) consumer culture. Previous research indicates that the Nordic societal model of relatively open markets, strong welfare systems, and a relatively egalitarian stance to social differentiation has fostered a different type of consumer culture.

Both producers (Kjeldgaard & Ostberg, 2007) and consumers (Wikström, 1997) perceive consumer culture and globalized market offerings differently than market actors in more stratified cultural contexts. Management theory researchers have defined particular Nordic theoretical and practical approaches to management and organization theory (e.g., Czarniawska & Sevón, 2003) that are rooted in the Nordic egalitarian consensus culture. Within marketing there is a strong Nordic school of relationship marketing (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1996). The Nordic consumer culture stands in contrast to – and yet is compatible with – both European and North American formats. If results from Nordic management culture are transferable, Nordic consumer culture may be characterized by its ability to absorb cultural contradictions through a consensus making ideology (Byrkjeflot, 2003).

Due to Nordic particularities such as the pragmatic acceptance of global capitalism combined with a tradition for state intervention in markets, egalitarianism coupled with focus on individual freedom, the fervent implementation of the Enlightenment project combined with state churches, and the combination of extremely lax rules of employment with high degrees of unionization, the development of a homogeneous consumer culture in Nordic countries seems unlikely. Instead one might argue that the mythology of the Nordic socio-cultural model constitutes a specific way of receiving and interpreting global consumer culture (Østergaard, 1997, 2006). We argue that to employ a transnational perspective both historically and to contemporary market formations, the study of the Nordic region allows for insights into how glocalization can be grasped fruitfully at a supra-regional level rather than falling into a methodological nationalism. Regional approaches may reveal structural commonalities of cultural meaning in marketplaces otherwise hidden by an epistemology of "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) and of the contemporary pertaining to the tendency in consumer-cultural research to study particular locations in temporal isolation (Iriye, 2004).

While the Nordic could be argued to be just another context, we argue that applying this more macro perspective has the potential to allow us to see the historical and contemporary processes of the formation of glocalization beyond particular nation-state histories and particularities

(Kjeldgaard & Ostberg, 2007). This session addresses this agenda from four different perspectives and provides insights into new streams of research for consumer culture theory. In the first presentation, the author discusses the opportunities and limits of studying regions vis-a-vis theory development, drawing on extant CCT theory and social anthropology. The second presentation looks at internal conflict in the otherwise consensual Nordic context – the market emergence of Restaurant Day as a spatial resistance to welfare state control over consumer culture. The third presentation addresses the internal differences between two Nordic contexts in terms of state regulation and consumer-cultural gender identity projects by focusing on the differences in Danish and Swedish legislation for paternity leave as it is reflected in the market place. It hence addresses the relation between state regulation and consumer identity projects. The fourth paper takes a myth market perspective to look at the perception of the Nordic myth outside the Nordic context, that is, how the myth of the region becomes a resource for imagining alternative forms of social organization under contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

REGIONS AS A MEANS OF THEORIZING IN CCT

Jeppe Trolle Linnet

Many CCT scholars base their theoretical insights on empirical studies and references to cultural phenomena that represent a North American context. Differences in findings between cultural regions are rarely used as springboard for theoretical refinement. Regional assertiveness seems to be emerging however, which problematizes the cross-cultural applicability of CCT's core theories and concepts. Work is ongoing in the Nordic and Latin American regions respectively with the organizational aim of strengthening networks among CCT researchers studying in each region, and with the conceptual aim of outlining the characteristics of consumer culture particular to each.

Aspects of local culture and society are often invoked in CCT for different purposes of analysis and criticism, but an overall discussion is needed of the opportunities and pitfalls offered by the regional orientation as such. This presentation aims to aid that development by letting CCT take advantage of discussions that have unfolded in social anthropology regarding the role of regions in theory-building and the potential tension between regional particularity and theoretical generality.

Numerous articles and book chapters in CCT, and the wider field of consumption-oriented social science, draw on regional context to explain particular phenomena (e.g., Askegaard & Madsen, 1998; Dong & Tian, 2009; Ger & Belk, 1999; Holt, 2003; Kjeldgaard & Ostberg, 2007; Luedicke, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010; Nguyen & Belk, 2013; Peñaloza, 2001; Thompson & Tian, 2008). Recognizing implicitly that no phenomenon is ever "exclusively local," the authors build general consumption theory upon local findings. A stream of articles within the regional context-oriented literature does not only use local findings to exemplify or nuance existing theory, but also more or less explicitly to launch a critique of mainstream CCT for being culturally one-sided. They show that while prevailing theories posit certain principles and relations as being central to a given consumption or marketing phenomena, quite different principles dominate that subject matter if investigated in a wider range of cultural contexts: Consumer motivations and market configurations central to one region may be largely absent in other cultural contexts (Cova, 2005; Patterson & Brown, 2007; Üstüner & Holt, 2010).

These papers suggest not only that core CCT concepts cannot adequately analyze particular local variations, but that in themselves, they represent one particular cultural dynamic writ large – in most cases that of North America. This may not only lead to analytical misrepresentation of consumer-cultural phenomena, but also managerial mismanagement, for example, in the case of brand communities (Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007). This discussion of whether the applicability of central concepts and paradigms is limited because being tied to particular societies or epochs is of course not only relevant to CCT. It is a critique also leveled, for example, at classical works of consumption sociology (Bourdieu, 1984; Üstüner & Holt, 2010).

With an increased focus on regional distinctiveness, CCT is bound to discuss the degree to which findings from one region speak to those from others. In comparative social anthropology, attempts to create such bridges generate theory. To qualify such debates and the general awareness of the opportunities and pitfalls that rationality offers CCT, the paper introduces Arjun Appadurai's analysis of the role of regions in anthropological theory development (1986). In Appadurai's perspective, regions facilitate the development of theory on specific issues, and continue to showcase particular theories: France of the 1970s proves a fertile ground for developing an understanding of bourgeois secular hierarchy, while the Indian caste system affords a different approach to hierarchy centered not on ideas of taste, but also of bodily purity and pollution. The Nordic region today may be

becoming a showcase for egalitarianism. The problem is that a gatekeeper-effect arises which may constrain theoretical innovation: Certain issues can only be discussed with reference to a particular locality, and interpretations of data from that locality may conversely be dominated by certain paradigms that impede, for example, studies of consumption phenomena. In light of Appadurai's insights, the paper discusses the risks and opportunities of regionalism in CCT with reference to the works mentioned above.

The paper advocates what we may call a Regional Consumer Culture Theory (RCCT): A new body of theory in CCT characterized by cross-cultural reflection. RCCT would intensify theoretical development by discussing structures of sameness and difference in the cultural worldviews and practices of consumers and marketers across the world. It would also engage studies from different regional contexts in dialogue, building both regionally and cross-culturally oriented theory.

NORDIC COOL: MARKET EMERGENCE AND THE WELFARE STATE

Henri Weijo, Diane M. Martin, and John W. Schouten

The question of who gets to appropriate space is a highly political affair. Following the philosophical foundations of Heidegger (1962), De Certeau (1984), Habermas (1991) and Foucault (1977), consumer researchers have become sensitive to how space influences the experience of consumption, consumer subject positions or agency, and works as physical manifestations for certain consumption discourses. Space is also an important constituting element of markets, an influential physical manifestation of the "market place" and convergence point for much consumer−marketer interaction (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010; Humphreys, 2010; Martin & Schouten, 2014; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Much of existing consumer research has concentrated on the way consumers appropriate space at the more immediate local level, for example, through imaginative practices of adaptation, or even resistance, to marketer-controlled space (Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Kozinets, 2002; Tumbat & Belk, 2011; Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, & Anderson, 2010).

The negotiation of space in consumption is often a long-term endeavor involving multiple stakeholders with much of it occurring outside the actual space itself (Humphreys, 2010). For example, though Burning Man is defined by its annual hyper communal get-together in the Nevada desert,

practically all of the organization, negotiation, and even reliving of the event takes place online outside the actual event days (Kozinets, 2002). Political systems and ideologies that govern or influence consumption are also important elements in such negotiations (Arnould, 2007; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004). However, outside Humphreys's (2010) study of the legitimation of casino gambling, views of societal negotiation of space have been largely absent in consumer research. In this study we explore how the negotiation and maneuvering of urban activists, city officials, local and state politicians, the media, and particularly consumers resulted a novel consumption activity, which to some degree followed a pattern of market emergence (Martin & Schouten, 2014), without quite resulting in a full-blown traditional market.

This research projects draws from an ethnographic inquiry of Restaurant Day (RD), a "food carnival" held four times a year where people from all different walks of life set up one day pop-up restaurants. The first RD featured 12 restaurants and took place in Helsinki, Finland in the early summer of 2011. RD has since grown into a global phenomenon nearing peak attendance of almost a thousand restaurants globally. The vast majority of RD restaurants are still in Finland and in the greater Helsinki area. Our research team engaged in participant observation – both in groups and individually – through multiple RD events since 2011. In addition to observation and field notes, we collected photographic, videographic, and ethnographic interview data. Methodological approaches also included netnography before and after each RD and in-depth interviews with consumers, city officials, politicians, policemen, journalists, customers, and restaurant owners.

Our findings highlight the emergence of RD and how its legitimacy and dispersion were negotiated by multiple stakeholders at different stages of its growth. The first RD was organized by a small team of urban activists, who set up pop-up restaurants all over Helsinki and broadcasted their presence via social media. The originators evoked libertarian rhetorical framing to underscore the straightjacket of existing food and hygiene legislation imposed on restaurant entrepreneurship, and its subsequent effect on food culture in Finland. But the confrontational activist rhetoric was appropriated by the mobilization of a homegrown aesthetic that borrows from existing Nordic flea market and swap meet practices, lending legitimacy to RD (Belk et al., 1988). After the second RD event, city officials and politicians started to weigh in on the practice. Bureaucrats expressed worry about public safety; some politicians and restaurant owners complained that RD competed unfairly by avoiding taxes. Police also showed an interest in how

alcohol was liberally distributed to patrons. However, as RD gained popularity among consumers and visibility across media at home and abroad, some politicians rallied behind the practice. Today, RD is held regularly four times a year, but its transformational potential remains in question. It has undoubtedly increased interest in food culture, but the state and market co-optation has made RD more about fun and status competition rather than transformation (Kozinets, 2002). RD with its temporal bounds shares similarities with state efforts to limit recreational drug use to nightclubs, allowing for better control (Goulding, Shankar, Elliott, & Canniford, 2009). Whether RD exemplifies transformation of the market or yet another commodification of consumer resistance depends in part on local cultural responses. Investigation of this phenomenon in Finland offers insight into the particular nature of the Nordic project.

SAME SAME BUT DIFFERENT: GENDER IDEOLOGICAL TENSIONS BETWEEN DENMARK AND SWEDEN

Jacob Östberg

The Nordic countries, while individually quite different, still share some common politico-ideological traits. The common theme, sometimes mockingly referred to as the "Nanny state," is characterized by high taxes and a large, strong state aiming to, amongst other things promote social mobility and ensure the universal provision of basic human rights. To this end, the states in the Nordic countries continuously legislate and formulate policies to create change, not only by wealth redistribution but also by promoting certain ideologies. One domain where this has been particularly visible is gender, where increased gender equality has been an explicit goal for the Nordic countries over the last couple of decades.

The state, thus, has an explicit goal of creating change – or of intervening or even interfering, if one wants to use a stronger word – by altering not only what people do but also how they think. Such a political environment lends itself to a study of the connections between governmental policies and consumer culture, an area that has been relatively understudied in the field of consumer culture theory. Put simply, governmental policies over time shape the available subject positions available for consumers by working as a force – alongside the market, popular culture, religion, etc. – that provides consumers with symbolic material available for identity construction.

Both Denmark and Sweden have, relative to most other Western countries, propagated state ideologies of gender equality (Cronholm, 2009). The different social roles of females and males in contemporary society are naturalized by references to how male and female bodies are constituted in different ways, making them appropriate for certain types of activities (West & Zimmerman, 1987). One of the key differences, in this type of reasoning, lies in the capacity of females to give birth to babies. As a consequence of this biological difference, it is many times presupposed that females should undertake the task of nurturing babies and raising children. This particular gender division seems to be one of the core obstacles for reaching what some consider to be the ideal of a gender equal society (Haux, 2011). To overcome this, Danish and Swedish policy seeks to facilitate men's involvement in childcare and family life, by sharing responsibility for housework and caring. For example, the Swedish government has actively publicized fathers' leave entitlements, available since 1974, through periodic educational and information campaigns, and Denmark instigated a gender-neutral parental leave policy in 2002 (Drew, 2005; Ray, 2008).

While there are many similarities between Denmark and Sweden, especially from an outside perspective, there are also many differences. Vulgarizing the discussion a bit one could say that the gender discussion has been taken "further" in Sweden. Examples include the recent introduction of a gender-neutral pronoun in the Swedish language, a word that made its way into the national encyclopedia in 2009, and gender-neutral kindergartens where efforts are taken to "free children from social expectations based on their sex." While these initiatives receive their fair share of criticism within Sweden, an even sharper critique, and sometimes ridicule, is coming from the Danish side. Sweden is accused of being obsessed with political correctness and to be conducting social experiments with vulnerable children. Denmark, on the other hand, is accused of not taking gender issues seriously, an accusation that culminated when Danish public TV aired a series of shows called "Blachman," where two fully dressed men sit in a sofa in front of nude, silent women and talk. This tension between the two countries in their view of gender led to a unique initiative where the two leading newspapers in Sweden and Denmark collaborated to jointly publish a debate between a Danish anthropologist and a Swedish feminist literary scholar and journalist. This debate exposed the ideological divergence between the two countries in a rather striking manner.

This paper aims to first discuss the role of state policy initiatives in influencing consumer culture, using the example of gender politics in Sweden and Denmark. Then it aims to use the differences between Sweden and

Denmark to highlight the way in which state ideology simultaneously limits and enables the potential subject positions that individuals can assume. Specifically, this paper will look at masculinity and how gender identity is enacted in the consumption domain. Previous masculinity studies in the field of CCT have largely been empirically grounded in a North American setting (Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2012; Harrison & Gentry, 2007; Holt & Thompson, 2004). These studies typically suggest that men are reframing traditionally female consumption activities in order to preserve their sense of masculinity (Ostberg, 2012). Suffice to say that the state initiatives in Denmark and Sweden have opened up for a wider variety of ways to negotiate one's gender identity in the marketplace, albeit with different nuances depending on the particular legislature and policy initiatives, and ensuing media climate, in Denmark and Sweden, respectively.

CONSUMING THE NORDIC UTOPIA IN THE MYTH MARKET OF SUSTAINABLE CAPITALISMS

Lars Pynt Andersen, Dannie Kjeldgaard, and Stine Bjerregaard

Amidst anxieties among citizens in many parts of the world over how best to organize societies after the financial crisis and continuing neoliberalization, "the Nordic model" has resonated in such discussions. The Nordic Model has been discussed as a venerable utopian ideal among politicians, political scientists, economists, sociologists, and anthropologists and is currently the focus of global policy discussions (as exemplified by The Economist recently, the front page of which was called "The Nordic Countries: The Next Supermodel" (February 2, 2013)). In order to understand such myth markets of sustainable capitalisms, we explore how consumers appropriate such mythic resources (Thompson & Tian, 2008) of politico-ideological utopias through readings of popular culture. We explore this by way of a reception study of the Danish political TV drama *Borgen* among young British consumers.

Nordic Noir and Nordic Cool in Popular Culture

Designer furniture has successfully been marketed on global markets as "Nordic" since the 1950s (Roncha, 2008), but as a part of the recent wave of "Nordic Cool," Nordic TV dramas and crime fiction has reached

surprisingly large and diverse global audiences. Notable examples of widely appreciated Nordic TV drama include *Forbrydelsen* (The Killing), *Wallander, Broen* (The Bridge), *Lillehammer* (Lillyhammer), and *Borgen* (The Castle/Borgen).

It may seem an obvious creative opportunity to extend the genre of "noir" fiction to the Nordic context of deep winter darkness, chilling temperatures, and stoic heroes (or heroines) but more is at stake than a choice of scenery with a dab of exoticism when we look at the reception in popular discourses and in academic literature. Fan literature as Kennedy (2012) argues, can be both fetishizing and tongue in cheek sarcastic. But it is clear that the fascination is not just about traditional "whodunit" or melodrama but at least to some degree about the exotic gender roles and egalitarian socio-politics of the North.

Method and Findings

The TV series that seems to have sparked the most fascination with the Nordic Utopia is that of *Borgen:* a TV drama about the Danish parliament, people, and politics. It is a stoic Scandinavian melodrama; themes of political power play interwoven with the struggle for a work/life balance. The central characters, Birgitte Nyborg (Sidse Babette Knudsen), is portrayed as the perfect Nordic anti-Thatcher character: feminine, (mostly) soft spoken, strong and open minded. *Borgen* is produced by the Danish public service broadcaster DR (formerly a state media monopoly), with the explicit intention to present a narrative that may "gather the nation" and serve as a relatively realistic chronicle of the present Danish society. This means that it is actually not intended to be a cultural product for export or to be readily marketable to a global audience (such as much of the cultural production exported from the United States and United Kingdom).

However, *Borgen* has been exported to global audiences, with seemingly good success. But what actually happens when *Borgen* is consumed and transformed in these contexts? To what extent do the notions of the Nordic Utopia offer the viewer gratifications beyond the established genre convention, and how does the Nordic offer meanings that are relevant to the life world, longings, and dreams for a non-Danish audience?

We present the findings from a study of how young British viewers consume the Nordic Utopia when viewing *Borgen*. The methodology is inspired by reception studies in the classical tradition of Liebes and Katz (1993), which looks at the localized construction of meaning in globalized

media products. It is important to note that the study was not intended as a study of fan communities or fan culture, but of the mundane, casual consumption of *Borgen* by viewers in the London area. The experiences and meanings from the British context are briefly compared with that of a Danish indigenous audience. Preliminary findings suggest the Nordic Utopia as an important frame of reference for the UK audience but also point to some examples of how these viewers may struggle to make meaning of the presented Danish social structures.

DISCUSSION

Our study of the consumption of the Nordic Utopia speaks to several conceptual dialogues in Consumer Culture Theory: First, it addresses the cross-cultural, or glocal, dynamics of myth markets. Second, we demonstrate how ideals of social organizing, popular culture, societal models, and consumer culture are interwoven in the myth markets of sustainable capitalisms.

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THE BRANDED AND GENDERED BRAZILIAN BODY: MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTIONS IN AN OVERLOOKED CONTEXT

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Keywords: Latin America; Brazil; consumer culture; beauty; body; luxury brands

INTRODUCTION

Bernardo Figueiredo

Since its first conference in 2006, CCT has been growing in size and reach. Some have noted that CCT has become much more European in the recent years, with North American and European countries taking turns to host the event. A recent paper by Thompson, Arnould, and Giesler

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(2013, p. 164) argues that the CCT heteroglossia should be incentivized through the promotion of a shift "in a direction that more fully recognizes the distinctive theoretical, contextual, and institutional interests of scholars located in the global South." Indeed, previous culture-centric work focusing on the global South (e.g., Arnould, 1989; Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Dolan & Scott, 2009) has demonstrated the benefits of moving beyond Americo-Eurocentrism in consumer research. Contexts from global South help promote a distinctive logic of marketing and consumption practices, which revitalizes the CCT field as a whole and promotes the development of theory. However, studies coming from, or based on, these contexts are not numerous. The few existing studies have focused mostly on parts of Southeast Asia and Africa. Latin America remains a vastly unexplored area for consumer culture researchers. More work on the area is imperative, given the political and economic weight recently acquired by some countries in the international scene. Brazil, for example, now has the seventh largest GDP in the world (http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/overview), and a variety of unexplored issues related to the socio-historical shaping of localized cultures of consumption.

To help close this gap, the three papers in our session engage with Brazilian contexts. Our aim is to go beyond simply having Brazil as the background for the studied phenomena. We use this session to theorize the role of Brazilian sociocultural contexts in shaping consumer phenomena. Contexts matter not only because they "engage our emotions and our senses, stimulate discovery, invite description and excite comparison" (Arnould, Price, & Moisio, 2006, p. 106), but also because they provide specific instantiations from which to see, feel, think, and understand consumer behavior. The three papers in this special session take the task of demonstrating how the emerging South may provide CCT scholars with valuable research contexts. With a focus on Brazilian settings, we want to discuss how these contexts help produce specific findings that enlighten understanding of CCT issues.

In particular, our session focuses on how Brazilian contexts provide the conditions for the development of specific material and symbolic constructions of branded and gendered bodies. The first paper develops a socio-semiotic analysis of Brazilian discourses on beauty and status to unearth countervailing positions on colonial discourses on the female body and beauty. The analysis is used to inform how Brazilian luxury brands can use emerging cultural discourses of creativity to leverage their strategic positioning in relation to other discourses pursued by (global) luxury brands. The second paper examines how Rio's beach culture informs the way gay

men use their body to engage in distinct and localized gender expressions. Stigma is resisted through the construction of localized body aesthetics, which leads to a strong internal pressure and stress derived from the practices of consumption and production of an idealized muscled beach body. The third paper examines how the development of Brazilian society in the late twentieth century has shaped symbolic and material constructions of female bodies in relation to plastic. Examining how a Brazilian brand has used the increased plasticization of the Brazilian body in its advertisements, the authors trace a cultural background for analyses of the material interactions between consumers and plastic shoes. Together, these three papers offer insights into different ways in which contexts from the global South illuminate our understanding of the intersections between brands, bodies, and gender.

LEVERAGING LOCAL LUXURY BRANDS THROUGH UNDERSTANDING COLONIAL DISCOURSES ON BEAUTY, BODY AND GENDER IN BRAZIL

Nacima Ourahmoune, Bernardo Figueiredo and Pilar Rojas

Recent developments in CCT research have shown a growing interest among CCT scholars in applying cultural perspectives to inform strategic marketing management (Holt & Cameron, 2010; McCracken, 2011; Peñaloza, Toulouse, & Visconti, 2012). The successful introduction of a CCT track at the American Marketing Association Conference also confirms the rising interest among marketers in how a cultural perspective can shed light on understandings of marketplace dynamics (www.ama.org). Despite this growth in awareness, studies trying explicitly to bridge CCT research and strategic management are scarce, and this gap is much more evident in non-Western contexts and emerging markets (Jafari, Firat, Süerdem, Askegaard, & Dalli, 2012). In addition, most research on luxury in the cultural field takes traditional markets as their site of investigation (Dion & Arnould, 2011; Rinallo & Golfetto, 2006). However, luxury market dynamics are changing as emerging markets become not only attractive target consumer markets but also cultural producers that redefine beauty and luxury.

Therefore, in this paper we explain how the analysis of cultural contradictions regarding the female body in Brazil can shed light on the strategic positioning of local and global luxury brands. We ask: How can

a socio-historical analysis of relationships between social status and body/appearance help marketers navigate the luxury brand market? How should local and global luxury brands position themselves in the Brazilian market, given the socio-historical particularities of the relationships between social status and body/appearance?

Luxury brands can be viewed as cultural platforms for ideological statements (Askegaard, 2006; O'Guinn & Muniz, 2004). As such they are highly connected to socio-historical elements that permeate their identity (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2003). Advertising, fashion, and design infuse brands with societal values (McCracken, 1986) that are not only reproduced but also subject to modification when brands travel to distant markets. Consequently, the translation of a brand's identity into market positioning varies depending on the context in which the brand is operating. In particular, the Brazilian market is characterized by specific beauty values and cultural contradictions intrinsic to the development of Brazilian society. Understanding the origin and interplay of these cultural contradictions is not only key to successful branding in this market but it also allows for promotion of new cultural discourses that may foster local development while rejecting colonial-based discourses.

Our work is constituted of four phases. First, we review historical and trans-disciplinary sources to identify key cultural contradictions framing discourses on the female body in Brazilian society (Da Matta, 1997; Holt & Thompson, 2004). We were able to identify two opposing discourses that stem from Brazilian colonial history and are related to class and geographical divides. The tropical discourse is linked to valorization of natural beauty and the body of the mestizo women. This discourse is frequently associated with the phenotype of the lower classes in colonial Brazil. The polar discourse is based on the idealization of European beauty and represents the aspirations of the Brazilian upper classes. Although these two discourses have originated in colonial Brazil, they have become deeply inserted in the Brazilian imaginary and have been reproduced over and over in popular culture, including recent music, books and films. Second, we contrast the two deeply rooted cultural discourses on the female body/status to reflect on the dialectics of tropical vs. polar beauty ideals in Brazil and construct a semiotic square of possible cultural positions. Third, we conduct a semiotic investigation (Floch, 2001; Oswald, 2012; Ourahmoune & Ozçaglar-Toulouse, 2012) of the various symbolic discourses embraced by luxury brands in the Brazilian context. We use global and local luxury brands' print ads collected from Brazilian Vogue and Elle from December 2012 to April 2013 to identify how different brands position themselves in

the semiotic square. Fourth, a second wave of data collection consists of data we collected from the Brazilian Vogue and Elle websites as well as Brazilian fashion and luxury blogs (Kozinets, 2010) to enhance and verify the consistency of the ads with the brands' overall positioning from 2010 to 2013 to follow up on and identify the consistent stories/positioning within global and local brand discourses.

The semiotic analysis associated with a socio-historical contextualization of these discourses allows us to explain the recent transformation of beauty ideals in the Brazilian luxury market and reveal the broader cultural discourses that animate the current positioning of various luxury brands. The emergent semiotic square yields a map of six cultural territories of expression available to luxury brands in Brazil. In particular, the map reveals a space we called rebel/creative, which provides a chance for Brazilian luxury brands to leverage their local roots without reproducing the cultural segregation of the colonial discourse (Bhabha, 2004). Overall, our work helps demonstrate how CCT/cultural research can inform strategic decisions that leverage local discourses in non-Western contexts through a socio-historical analysis of the relationships between the context (Brazil), luxury brands, and local discourses on gender and the body.

CONSUMED BODIES: REVELATIONS FROM THE GAY CONSUMER CULTURE IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Severino J. N. Pereira

CCT scholars have investigated stigma as an attribute that conveys a devalued social identity to an individual across most social contexts, resulting in feelings of powerlessness (Henry & Caldwell, 2006) and higher risk in market interactions (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Crockett, Grier, & Williams, 2003). Stigmatized individuals exhibit multiple and diverse responses that include resignation, escapism, concealment, and withdrawal, but also confrontation, creative production, and mainstream engagement (Henry & Caldwell, 2006). From this gamut of identified responses to stigma, research has given more attention to passive stigma management, that is, identity transformation. Moreover, this work has focused on psychological and behavioral aspects of stigma management (Adkins & Ozanne, 2005; Goffman, 1988) to the detriment of body transformation. However, we note, the social world of an individual operates to enforce and strengthen a system of meanings and practices associated with the body. The result is

a kind of socialization that causes the individual to deeply internalize the discipline and normalization of the body itself (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

This work has investigated how the discourse associated with the body as a possession is used by a group of gay men in Rio de Janeiro to face the stigma of homosexual identity. More specifically, we ask: what is the role of body consumption in the attribution of meaning to the Brazilian body by stigmatized consumers? How is body consumption used by a group of gay men in Rio de Janeiro to face the stigma of homosexual identity?

To answer those questions, we conducted an ethnographic study with participant observation, between 2005 and 2008, in the day-to-day life of a group of gay men in Rio de Janeiro. We also did interviews with 20 gay men living in Rio de Janeiro (McCracken, 1988).

The hyper valorization of the body – one of the remarkable features of the *carioca* (residents of Rio de Janeiro) identity (Goldenberg & Ramos, 2007; Gontijo, 2007) – seems to be reflected in the city's gay culture. However, this aesthetics of hyper valorization of the male body seems to be also one of the gay group's internal identification codes – using aesthetic consumption standards to distinguish insiders from outsiders (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

> Rio de Janeiro is a seaside town where the body is highly valorized, because social meetings happen mostly on the beach. So you are constantly seeing, being seen, comparing yourself with others, and it is natural that one ends up suffering a bit. So you end up thinking: "it is about time I take care of the body". Besides, the gay aesthetic sense is much sharper than that of a straight guy. And so Rio´s culture of body worship becomes potentialized in the gay world. (Paul, 35)

The quote illustrates a common discourse in this context, one that shows how the body is modified and managed as an object associated to *carioca* identity (Gontijo, 2007) as well as to the local gay culture. According to informants' discourses, strong aesthetic pressure is put on individuals when they enter the gay world. This augmented pressure results from the intersection of the emphasis on the body in Rio's beach culture and the cult of the body in Brazilian gay culture. This aesthetic pressure made many informants engage in a process of reconstruction and manipulation of their own bodies; a process that is consistent with Giddens' (1991) conception of the body as a way to build a unique and integrated self.

During fieldwork, we observed how the context of being in a city as Rio de Janeiro shaped the beauty ideal of the male body to the gay group. In this group, the male body is constructed and negotiated as an ideal of

a young and healthy-looking body, which transpires a certain kind of masculinity – in fact, hypermasculinity. Through the manipulation of the body and use of specific clothes and brands, this aesthetics of hypermasculinity appears in the informants' speech as one of the clearest forms of homosexual identity and, consequently, a former opposition to heterosexual identity.

According to our informants, a masculine and toned, muscled body is a sign of health and virility and reinforces a more "normal" (i.e., more accepted to a heterosexual society) homosexual identity. However, the demand for "normality" is achieved through the construction of body aesthetics, which leads to a strong internal pressure and personal stress derived from the practices of consumption and production of the idealized body. After all, stress serves as an internal standard for the group, which simultaneously frees and imprisons individuals battling against stigma, while building a new constitutive stigma group (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Goffman, 1988). The unintentional consequence of this stigma management strategy is that the eternal search for beauty and dissatisfaction with the body transforms forms of social legitimation into sources of anxiety and insecurity. Thus, the body becomes a "badge" (Goldenberg & Ramos, 2007, p. 39) that turns the subject into a vigilante who needs to control his own body, beat it, tame him, and imprison it in order to achieve the "good shape" required by the group. These findings highlight the unintended consequences of coping with stigma by manipulating the local meanings associated to the body through aesthetic consumption.

PLASTIC FANTASTIC: MATERIAL INTERACTION AND THE PLASTICIZATION OF THE BRAZILIAN BODY

Daiane Scaraboto and Marcia Christina Ferreira

Moving beyond the idea of objectification (Borgerson, 2009; Miller, 1998) this study explores material interaction, that is the "pragmatic relations that situate the meaning of objects in relation to other objects and the intentions of the designer and the user" (Dant, 2008, p. 11). We examine how consumers relate not only to an object, but also to its material components in order to develop consumption meanings (Bettany, 2007; Kravets & Örge, 2010). Current research largely overlooks how material interaction shapes the broader cultural context where it happens (Latour, 2000;

Watson, 2008). Thus, patterns and associations between consumer culture and material interaction which influence the construction of consumer meanings for objects remain underexplored.

We start addressing this gap by accounting for the role of culture in shaping material interaction. We examine advertising and body ideals (i.e., intermediary cultural texts), which could shape designers' creativity and hence interfere with the "situationally contingent … unfolding engagement between consumer and product" (Watson, 2008, p. 7).

We investigate the material interaction of consumers with plastic shoes drawing from the case of a Brazilian brand: Melissa. Owned by the largest shoe manufacturer in Brazil, Melissa has launched more than 500 different shoes and exported over 55 million pairs to 80 countries throughout 36 years. To analyze this trajectory, we collected the digital versions of 111 print ads launched by the brand between 1978 and 2012. Our synchronic and diachronic semiotic analysis of these ads focused on the interplay between plastic and body, and on the evolution of this interplay through time (Berger, 2012; Philips & McQuarrie, 2002). We ask: What is the relation between plastic and body encapsulated in the ads? How do the proposed meanings relate to body ideals prevalent in Brazil?

We identify six phases distinctly marked by changes on how body and plastic – consumer and material – relate in the ads. From sanitized portrayals in which plastic shoes are worn with socks, through displays of a comfortable relationship where models are displayed on plastic couches, the relation has evolved to portrayals in which the flesh body is absent, being replaced with plastic dolls, and where bodily shapes are outlined with plastic threads.

Goldenberg, whose research mainly addresses the cultural understandings of the Brazilian body, observes that body matters are more important in Brazil than the clothes someone wears – the body is clothing, she says. "It … must be exhibited, molded, manipulated, worked, sewed, ornate, picked, constructed, produced, imitated. It is the body that goes in and out of fashion" (2006, p. 119). Hence, it makes sense to discuss the ins and outs of fashion in terms of body ideals in Brazil and to trace their parallel with the plasticization of the body evidenced through time in Melissa ads (Table 1).

Overall, we notice that changes in the ads might have been influenced by cultural changes (Schroeder, 2009), by the evolution of advertising itself, by new trends in graphic design, and by the evolving understandings of plastic in Brazil and worldwide (Gabrys, Hawkins, & Michael, 2013). Nevertheless, the increased plasticization of the body through time is unmistakable, and it

Table 1. The Evolution of Body-Plastic Relations in Melissa Advertisements.

Phase	Description	Example	Brazilian Body Ideals
1. *Friendship* (1979–1985)	The body does not touch plastic: the sandals are worn with socks. Brazilian actresses are portrayed in natural, informal postures. Models have their feet on the ground (literally) and plastic is visible only in the shoes. The caption for one of these ads reads: "Melissa: the star of the plastic era."	http://goo.gl/B0BKs8	In the late 1970s, when Melissa was launched, the popular soap opera *Dancing Days* was on air (1978–1979). The main character in it was played by actress Sonia Braga. She was short, and had tan skin, a thin waist, large hips, small breasts, and long curly black hair. Hers was the ideal body in Brazil at that time (Freyre, 1987), which permeated Brazilian culture through "prestigious imitation" (Mauss, 1974). That ideal was close to the body nature gave many Brazilian women.
2. *Desire* (1990–1994)	Ads portray famous Brazilian and international top models wearing Melissa shoes without socks. Contrasting with the previous phase, now there are other plastic elements on the ads in addition to the shoes. Body and plastic are shown in a comfortable relationship.	http://goo.gl/DlcFE3	Increasing familiarity with European and American models introduced other types of body into the Brazilian imaginary. The 1990s is known in the fashion world as the "supermodels era" (Gross, 2011). The most popular soap opera in Brazil at the time was *Top Model* (1989–1990). Melissa launches its "*Top Collection*."
3. *Intimacy* (1998–2000)	Non-famous teenagers pose in playful or resting poses, wearing the plastic shoes and minimal clothing (comfortable underwear). The shoes are transparent, beige, or black. The feeling is	http://goo.gl/xQmnbG	In the 1990s, Brazil opens up to imports. Hence, foreign cultures influence Brazilian culture in a much more pervasive way. International brands and styles are adopted by Brazilian consumers, who were dissatisfied with the local scenario. The grunge is one of the strongest influences of the end of the 1990s,

Table 1. *(Continued)*

Phase	Description	Example	Brazilian Body Ideals
	of intimacy, and the plastic shoes are portrayed as part of the almost naked body. Melissa launched a campaign targeting teenagers, with the slogan "Always the same, always different."		and sets the tone for the body ideals prevalent at that time: the body is loose, naturally shaped.
4. *Fusion* (2002–2005)	Melissa ads featured Barbie-like dolls instead of human models. The body becomes plastic. The ads are colorful and playful, and slogans refer to the attractiveness of plastic ("Men who invented plastic ended up victims of their own invention," and "Before resorting to silicone, try plastic"). This is Melissa's first attempt to replace body with plastic in ads, a representation that would be resumed later, at phase 6.	http://goo.gl/rv0sMv	Plastic surgery starts to be widely known in Brazil. Thanks to the work of Dr. Pitangy and his medical students, plastic surgery starts to be offered in the national public health system in 2001. The early 2000s are characterized as the boom of plastic surgery in Brazil.
5. *Simulation* (2006–2011)	Human models are back in the ads, following the brand's strategy to invest on celebrity sponsorships. The	http://goo.gl/qgvmL4	The number of plastic surgeries in Brazil almost doubles between 2008 and 2011, reaching one million operations per year (SBCP, 2013). *Funk* music culture gains prominence, and along with it comes an

	models showing in the ads gain plastic-like properties: firm, doll-like postures, and un-natural smoothness and glow to their skin. These portrayed models and celebrities are juxtaposed over colorful graphics, in scenarios redesigned by computer.		exacerbation of workouts to shape the bottom part of the body. Women with large, shapely rear ends are monicked “Fruit-women” (*Mulheres-fruta*) and become national celebrities.
6. *Sublimation* (2012–2013)	The body is once again replaced with plastic. Here, however, this replacement is intensified. Facial expressions and other human features are absent – only bodily shapes are displayed.	http://goo.gl/LEZaSW	São Paulo Fashion Week becomes the most important fashion event in Latin America, with one million visitors (compared to 100,000 in 1996). With the increasing relevance of fashion for Brazilian consumers, there is not one clear body ideal, but a myriad of options consumers may emulate, depending on their identity goals and social milieu.

is also clearly associated with the transformation of the female body ideals in Brazilian society. As portrayed in Melissa ads, plastic and body increasingly merge, seamlessly replacing one another not only through the plastic appearance of bodies, but also portraying the properties of plastic as capacities of the body (e.g., molding). This process goes along with the increasing popularity among Brazilians of plastic surgery, known in the country as *plástica* (Edmonds, 2009). Another parallel trend in body fashion is the pervasiveness of body shaping through exercising (*malhação*) aiming to add volume to specific body parts which are valued in the Brazilian ideal of a sexy body, such as thighs and butt. Melissa ads frequently make direct reference to those body ideals, such as in two ads which read: "*Before resorting to silicone, try plastic*" and "As the plastic takes shape, innocence goes away."

We tracked changes over time in these proposed consumer-material interactions and meanings, offering a socio-historical perspective of the role of intermediary texts in shaping material interaction between Brazilian consumers and plastic shoes. Our findings reinforce the need for a more culturally situated analysis of material interaction, even when the focus is narrowed from the object to its material components. Following what Askegaard and Linnet (2011) have called "the context of the context," we undertake a historically situated analysis for further understandings of body plasticity in Brazilian culture. Understandings of the pragmatics of material interaction are enriched when examined against this fabric of culturally and temporally variant readings of consumers and objects.

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